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SOLILOQUY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

THE CONFESSIONS OF A WELL-
MEANING WOMAN

THE SENSATIONALISTS: PART III.—

THE SECRET VICTORY

THE SENSATIONALISTS: PART II.—

THE EDUCATION OF ERIC LANE

THE SENSATIONALISTS: PART I.—

LADY LILITH

SONIA MARRIED

MIDAS AND SON

NINETY-SIX HOURS' LEAVE

SONIA

THE SIXTH SENSE

SHEILA INTERVENES

THE RELUCTANT LOVER

WHILE I REMEMBER

SOLILOQUY: *A NOVEL*
By STEPHEN McKENNA



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TO
THREE GRACIOUS LADIES
IN
A SMALL AND FROSTY COUNTRY

" . . . Ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
'Do I live, am I dead?' Peace, peace seems all . . ."

—ROBERT BROWNING: *The Bishop Orders His Tomb
at Saint Praxed's Church.*

SOLILOQUY

CHAPTER ONE

I

FRANKLY, my dear Ada, I came here to die because I'd nowhere else to go: Grace would have made so many difficulties, and I didn't choose to put myself under an obligation to Joan. I suppose I've patronized them both for so long that they felt they must have their revenge by sneering at me behind my back:—"my sister, Marion Shelley. Bless you, *we* never see her—not grand enough! Though, if we caught a new poet, you'd find Marion coming round quickly enough to steal him for her *salon*—", and, as *they* knew that *I* knew . . .

Well . . .

I found them husbands and made some kind of a position for them; women don't easily forgive kindness. And, because they're too stupid and too lazy, I couldn't make them as good a position as my own; no woman forgives that in her benefactor, least of all a sister. . . . I found *you* a husband, Ada; and whatever you and Arthur have, whatever you are, is all thanks to me. *You* don't find it easy to forgive that, do you? But you tolerate me. . . . Well, partly because your incurable sense of decency tells you that *one* of my sisters must stand by "dear Marion" while she's dying, partly because I've told you that my money, such as it is, will come to you. Let me die here in peace, and you may take everything. . . .

But I warn you! I'll alter my will, I'll cut you out and die on your hands without leaving you a penny if you tell me again "not to say such things," "not to be morbid," "not to be bitter"! Have I lied and pretended and

kept silence for twenty years to be told by a chit of a girl that I must go on being silent? "It sounds so cynical." . . . I was waiting for that! The worst-abused and least understood word in the language. I'm being *honest* and telling you the truth as I see it when I've no longer anything to gain by lying. I'm in *pain*, and you sit there expecting me to keep up pretences. I could if I wanted to; I'm not broken . . . yet; but I think I may possibly get some little relief by hurting myself more, biting on the aching tooth. It may hurt so much that I shall be reconciled to dying. . . . Death. . . . You aren't worried by the thought of my death; you've no *love* for me, you won't miss me; but you feel it would be indecent to turn your own sister into the street, you feel you ought to like me and be grateful to me. Why? Will you please tell me why?

I made Arthur Venne marry you because I couldn't have people talking about "dear Marion Shelley's *unhappy* sisters" and wondering why I didn't marry them off; I believe he has grown to like you, but he married you because he thought I should be such an asset as a sister-in-law. St. James', Piccadilly, at the very least; and, when it didn't materialize, he took to ritualism and you to babies; as your hopes of a bishopric vanished, he talked about his "vocation" and you advertised each new arrival as "the gift of a daughter." . . . But you can't decide whether to hate me more for what I've done or for what I've failed to do. I went through the same business with Grace and Joan, so I ought to know. I was such a success myself, I knew everybody; so I was expected to *place* my dear sisters. And I did. George Bartwell confidently hoped to be made a metropolitan magistrate the following week, and Tony Mansion fancied that I should at least get him an undersecretaryship. I did what I could, but you mustn't think it was for love of them; and, if I didn't feel any obligation to any of you, pray don't imagine that you need feel any to me. I despised you then, I despise you now. . . .

I suppose there *is* such a thing as family love, but it depends how much family is mixed in with the love. I had too much; I hated you—not individually, but as parts

of the family institution that was suffocating me. You personally I always liked, because you were gentle and gave me no trouble and you hadn't had time to grow embittered like the rest of us ; but the herd-life at Cambridge and Polehampton—You can't even remember that !—and then at Oxford. . . . The narrowness and meanness of it all, the jealousy, the vulgarity of that vile existence, our eternal man-hunts. . . . They *were* ! We all married, we can admit it now ! D'you wonder that we hated one another, *even* our own sisters, as you would say, when they blocked our one avenue of escape ? Father was always so much in the clouds, he didn't really belong to our life ; but, when mother shewed us off and put us through our paces for the smirking undergraduates who made a favour of dining with us . . . There were times when I locked myself in my room for fear of attacking her . . . literally . . . with my fists. . . .

That Oxford prison. . . . And outside it, sixty miles away, was London and the great world. The men who visited father, like pilgrims—Mark Hawthorne or Robert Digby—made me want to scream. That great, spacious life where you didn't have to think whether your frock would stand another cleaning, where you had culture instead of imbecile chatter about boat-races, where you talked with the men who were *doing* things instead of writing about them. . . . I don't know when I saw that Oxford was stifling me ; but it must have been George Brentwood—George Creal he was then—who opened my eyes to all I was losing. I determined to break away, to lay siege to London, to marry and take possession of the citadel. Nothing, I said, should stand in the way : parents, sisters, husband, children. That was the one thing worth having.

And I got it. For twenty years I ruled ; and at the end I abdicated voluntarily. Can you name a single statesman or artist of this generation who has not been my friend ? A soldier ? A scientist ? When I say " friend," I don't mean that they've dined with me once, when they could escape no longer, as with Lady Maitland ; the politicians came to me for advice, the authors sent me their

books in manuscript and dedicated them to me—not, you may observe, to ‘dear Margaret Poynter.’ You’ll find me in Agatha Wilmot’s *London Memories* and on every other page of Mark Hawthorne’s *Diaries*, when you look in vain for Connie Maitland or Lady Poynter. In every part of the intellectual, dynamic life of my generation I had a share: the books to read, the people to meet, the policies to follow . . . it was always, “We’d better not do anything till we’ve heard what Marion Shelley has to say about it.” . . . The one thing worth having. . . . When the papers said I was ill, there was such a procession of callers, such letters, such telephoning. . . . I came here to escape it; since then and for some time before I’ve been wondering whether it *was* the one thing worth having. . . .

I may live a week, I may live a month; but I hope I shan’t—for both our sakes. . . . Ah, don’t be sentimental! If you care for me at all—and there’s not the least reason why you should—tell the doctor not to spare the morphia when you see I need it. After I’m gone, you can lower your eyes and talk about “my poor dear sister” to your heart’s content! If there’d been anything in the world for me to live for, I should have let them operate; I could prolong the agony if I obeyed their ridiculous orders, instead of which I shall ask you to give me something to drink, I need stimulating. You have champagne in the house? I thought so; Arthur opens a bottle on your wedding-day, doesn’t he, and makes a little speech, with a professional reference to God’s mercies? And brandy? . . . A bottle or two in case of illness; I thought so! Don’t I know this life of yours inside out? Didn’t I nearly live it myself? He wasn’t a parson, but he was the same kind of thing. . . . Champagne. . . . *Or* brandy. . . . I’m watching to see your expression when I say—‘*both*’!

Yes, you’re shocked, as I expected. Well, I learnt that from Martin twenty years ago, in the first month of my married life. He did not drink it regularly; but, if he ever wanted to make a special effort . . . Instead of an ordinary brandy and soda. You never knew I took anything? My dear, is it likely that you should? No one’s

ever seen me ; and no one will ever guess the agonies I've been through in other people's houses, starving for it, feeling that my brain was paralysed ; I had to give up staying with my friends. At home I used to put out the wine for dinner—always drinking water myself—and slip a bottle of brandy into a locked cupboard of my bedroom ; when it was finished, I put it with the empties and pretended I'd been decanting it. You knew I wasn't made of iron ; I should have thought you might have divined that I couldn't stand that strain without something. Brandy was the only thing I drank regularly—a good measure of it while I was dressing for luncheon and again before dinner ; the mouth-wash I always used took away the smell. Brandy doesn't affect your figure or your complexion like other things ; at forty-five I'm still presentable, I think, but I've burnt my liver till it must be like a piece of shrivelled leather. . . .

No, *that* didn't shock you ! What you couldn't stand, with your love of "decency", was the idea that your sister drank ; you're wondering how to explain away to your servants all the empty bottles. And I don't care any longer. Six months ago, if any one had said that Marion Shelley *drank* . . . Now it makes me feel well and comfortable, and I can enjoy the one pleasure left to me—being absolutely frank. The glorious relief after all these years of repression ! I don't particularly want to attack any one ; I've a grudge against life, but not against any living man or woman, assuredly I'm not trying to justify myself, because everybody thinks I've made such a wonderful success. . . . Perhaps it's just that : perhaps I can't bear all this reputation for success when I know the full tragedy of failure ; I feel I must tell *somebody* about it. . . .

The quiet, reserved Marion Shelley ! Some one will probably write a little biographical sketch of me. . . . *Egeria*. . . . *The Last of the London Salons*. . . . And they'll all buy it and have it about on their tables to shew they were my friends ! . . . And for two years, I should say, you'll find that no one will try to give my sort of parties for fear people will say " You remember Marion Shelley's

wonderful evenings? ” or “ I haven’t the heart to go to these things since poor Marion Shelley died.” . . .

I suppose I’ve really reached my high-water mark. There was a time when I was simply called a “ climber ”—if only Martin had lasted long enough for me to get him even a knighthood, it would have been so much easier! The *help* a title gives you!—; but I lived that down. Lived it down in triumph, so that, when I quarrelled with Her Grace of Ross, London was divided for two days and then came down on my side. I was in a position to spoil any party she tried to give, by giving one myself on the same night. As I did—to teach her the lesson—, sending out the invitations by telephone three hours before. And Eleanor Ross found it expedient to apologize to me. There was a time, too, when the superior young men, like Murray Thorndike, who had flocked to me in the days of their poverty, turned up their noses at my “ plain living and high thinking ” (which meant that I didn’t give them champagne or allow them to monopolize the conversation). I lived that down, simply by letting them go; when they found themselves out in the cold—and alone, without even a reviewer to fawn on—they begged to be readmitted.

I hadn’t the *money* to compete with Connie Maitland or Margaret Poynter; but I had something that all their money couldn’t buy, something that Max Poynter’s disgusting great cigars never brought him. I don’t know what it was. Personality? That’s a meaningless word! I had intelligence, experience, resolution—oh yes! and you’d like your *cliché*: “ an infinite capacity for taking pains.” If no one can do again what I did, it’s because no one has my determination: I saw my goal from the beginning, I gave my life to it, I left nothing to chance; though I never spoke to Valentine Arden after his vile attack on me in that book of his, I went to his memorial service and gave Seffie Wyndham a lift home. When you snatch new friends from a memorial service, you deserve to succeed. . . .

For more than twenty years. . . If I’d been a barrister or a politician, I should have been on the Bench or in the Cabinet. . . Did it make me happy? I’ve been looking

back over all my life and trying to decide whether I could ever say 'I was happy *then*.' . . .

2

If I'm forty-five, you must be thirty ; so you wouldn't remember the old days at Cambridge. I don't remember much of them myself, because I was away at school for most of the time and father used to send me abroad whenever he could afford it. I was always supposed to have the brains of the family ; and he thought that, if he gave me a good education, I should be able to look after myself and spare you three a bigger share of the money, when he died.

I *suppose* I was happy *then*. We had a comfortable home, and father was so popular with the undergraduates that they made a great fuss of us all with presents and parties and picnics on the Backs. It was mother's best period, too, and I can just remember the days before she began to deteriorate : very tall and graceful she was then, with beautifully caressing manners and a splendid dignity that went so funnily with father's happy-go-lucky carelessness. It's from her we all learnt to move so well and hold ourselves properly. When you took away darling father's disgraceful old pipe and brushed his hair and smartened his clothes, they were the best-looking, the most striking couple in Cambridge ; but he hated to be tidied up and enjoyed nothing so much as a romp with us before we went to bed ; and at the end of the romp his hair was ruffled and his tie under one ear, and it was all mother could do to keep him from going out into the streets like that. Dear father ! He was such a delightful boy with his twinkling blue eyes and the gruff voice he used to put on for telling us stories ! He loved us, and we loved him ; the whole house was full of love, for in those days he and mother seemed to be living in an endless honeymoon. I cried all night before I went to King's Norton for my first term. . . .

And I really don't know when the change came. School was so absorbing that I wasn't very observant at home, but I do remember that, holidays after holidays, there

seemed less sunshine in Cambridge. Mother wasn't as beautiful as she had been, and she became very impatient with us; father began to look worried, too. At first, when he didn't play with us, I thought it was because we were growing up, then I saw he was absent-minded. I know now that this ten-years' honeymoon was over and that they were taking stock and settling down to life in earnest.

They never talked to me much about the early days, but I've been able to reconstruct them. Socially, father was nothing—the son of a very humble clerk in Somerset House—and throughout his life he remained modest and quite wonderfully grateful: grateful to be alive and well, grateful to have as much food as he needed, grateful to be invited about and never *seeing* that he was being lionized, grateful to have four daughters, grateful to be married to such a wife. Mother, I believe, was felt to have thrown herself away on him: her people were old family solicitors in Liverpool, and, with her eight or nine hundred a year, they expected her to do great things; instead, she made a pure love-match, though, if she had married for ambition, she would still not have done badly. The first ten years must have been heaven to them both! Father was so handsome and sweet; you can see from old photographs that we were adorable children; and they could watch his reputation growing and growing in Cambridge, in England, in Germany, in America until he stood alone, at forty, as the greatest living authority on Elizabethan literature. He loved his work and had no personal ambitions; mother, I fancy, *had*, but she would have been content with her position as wife of a professor or of the head of a college. Who would not? Unhappily, they couldn't afford to wait. Mother's money and father's salary were ample for the early years; but, when three daughters had to be fed and dressed and sent to school, when provision had to be made for them until they married, father had to change his whole mode of life.

It was a terrible disappointment when you were born: mother didn't like girls, didn't understand them; she was jealous if a man even looked at us, though we were only

children, and she grudged every smile that father spared us. A man's woman. . . And father, too, had been hoping so much for a son : though a boy's more expensive to start in life, there's something so hopeless about four girls, one after the other (we *had* to be called the Tenby Quartette at Oxford ; we were a fair mark as long as we were unmarried, and four sisters do frighten a man away : if one doesn't catch him, they all feel, another will. . . . And families where there *aren't* four sisters make themselves so facetious when the clothes descend from one to another. . .). You really made father decide to leave Cambridge. The beginning of mother's illness was the end of their honeymoon : no son, no more children and very little more youth : I always fancy that father waked suddenly to his responsibilities ; and, if I *had* been happy—I *must* have been, at Cambridge and King's Norton!—I ceased to be happy when father ceased to be a gay ragamuffin boy. I overheard him talking to mother one night a few months after you were born ; he had just brought out the big edition of Marlowe, and his reputation was made ; Harvard was inviting him to lecture, all sorts of people were offering him appointments of different kinds, and he had to make up his mind what to do.

"I must go where there's most money," I remember his telling mother. "I don't want to say good-bye to Clare, but we must look ahead to the time when our girls are grown-up. It will be a struggle."

Then he went on to say something about Polehampton : but I wasn't listening, because that word "struggle" had taken hold of my attention ; and I lay on my face before the fire, pretending to read a book and puzzling, puzzling. We'd always seemed to have enough of everything : holidays and treats and clothes, people to meals, my friends from school to stay with me in the holidays—things that I subconsciously knew *some* of our neighbours couldn't afford—; and, though some of the girls at King's Norton said they'd have to earn their living, it had never occurred to me that *I* should have to ; I imagined that, all in good time, I should marry and have a husband to provide me with money.

If I could reconstruct my ambitions from ten to fifteen, they were very simple: I must have had some personality, for I took the lead in everything at school, and the younger girls idolized me—putting flowers in my desk, blushing if I spoke to them and being utterly miserable if I lost my temper and told them not to be little fools; so I wanted to be popular, influential; and, as I had father's vivacity and mother's good features and slim, graceful body, I wanted to match myself with an equally fascinating husband. But I didn't analyse farther than that; I wasn't precocious in any way, either socially or sexually, or morbid. . . . I'd have married a duke or a dustman with equal pleasure if he was good-looking; I thought you could marry one as easily as the other; and, to me, marriage was a thing that came at the end of every novel, not a thing of passion, not a thing that could be intimate or wonderful . . . or degrading. . . . Yes, from ten to fifteen I was just a pretty, ignorant, jolly girl with more vitality than most; full of rather shallow ideals—assuring people solemnly that I wanted to leave the world just a little better than I'd found it—, clean as a pebble in a brook, and mentally and physically as half-baked as you'd expect me to be. Oh, I made sure I should marry and live in a house like father's and have children and be quite comfortable.

That there might be any struggle or difficulty never occurred to me until I overheard father talking. . . . Then I suddenly began to think of all the women I knew who *hadn't* married: the sisters and daughters of the dons, the mistresses at the school, who seemed quite old to me then. If I was clever and good-looking, so had they been once; everything, then, *didn't* come to everybody; life was a fight; perhaps I shouldn't marry and, whether I married or not, I must work hard and struggle for a place in the sun. It was hardly more than that then: when I kissed father good-night and went to bed, I determined—with some idea of helping him, because he was worried—to do wonderfully well at school, though very soon I saw that to do any good I must do better than others, better than *all* the others; it wasn't long before I saw myself with my hand against every one, though as yet I had no

definite ambitions. Fifteen is rather young to learn that. . . And I learnt to be jealous of all the people who *didn't* have to fight for themselves.

The next term at King's Norton I did very well indeed, but I despised the people I beat and hated the people who beat me. There were about four other girls who mattered in the Upper Fifth, and the one who got head remove into the Sixth would be Senior Monitor the next year. Mildred Stanley, Winifred Orm, Beatrice Selkirk and Joyce Armitage; we shared the same dormitory, we'd gone up the school together. I'd stayed with them, they'd stayed with me; and there wasn't much to choose between us except that Beatrice was curiously stupid in some ways and Joyce and Mildred were thoroughly idle. Well, I made up my mind to beat them, beat them all; and, when the half-term reports went out, I was second only to Beatrice Selkirk. She had been my greatest friend of all since the day when she got me out of a serious scrape; we shared the same study, her bed was next to mine, we told each other everything and wrote four and five times a week every holidays. For terms and terms she had always helped me with my sums while I helped her with her French. I was a shade cleverer than she was, though nothing like so plodding, and I knew I could master the wretched sums if I really tried. I was confirmed that term, and of course this gave me an opportunity of being as sanctimonious as I liked. I told Beatrice that I thought it was dishonest for us to do each other's work; at the end of the term I beat her in French *and* arithmetic. . . . And I despised her. . . . That was my first great meanness, and, once I'd begun to play for my own hand, I never faltered; it's true to say that in thirty years I've not sacrificed myself for a living soul. . . .

That spoilt King's Norton for me. The people ceased to be friends and became rivals: rivals in school and rivals in life . . . to be crushed or courted; and, before I could decide which it was to be, I had to analyse them, price them. Beatrice, when once I'd beaten her, passed out of my life: she would go out to India, I knew, and join her people; but I had to keep in with Winnie Orm, because she was

always giving me presents, though I hated her for having a rich father who would see to it that there was no struggle for *her*. Joyce Armitage I deliberately cultivated because I thought she would be useful to me: she was an only child, and her mother wanted her to have a friend of her own age; and *I* wanted them to go on asking me to stay with them in London for the holidays. Mildred I had to watch carefully; she had *no* money and was frankly determined to find a husband of some kind as quickly as possible; she was artful enough to get him, too, and clever enough to make a very good wife: what she didn't know about marketing, cooking, running a house . . . while she was still a *child*! . . . When she went to stay with people, you couldn't keep her out of the kitchen. . . . So for my last two years, you see, I was simply preparing. . . .

I tried to prepare myself, too, by learning something about life. One of the mistresses—I can't remember her name. Yes, I can! It was Kirby—Miss Kirby interested me enormously: she had a manner that marked her off from the others, and, when I saw how they all hated her, I knew they must feel she was superior to them. So she was. I used to sit in her room, and she told me little bits about herself: they'd been great people, and she'd been engaged, but the man had died, and her father had lost all his money. She told me what *she'd* been through before she got this job and how thankful she was for it, though there was so little future for her that she simply dared not contemplate what would happen when she had to resign. From her I learnt that this struggle might go on all your life. . . . She told me a lot that I suppose she had no business to; and I found out why the other mistresses hated her. They all pretended that they had a *vocation* for teaching; some of them talked about "women's work" and "woman's place in the world"; that was in the nineties, and just enough of the Ibsen influence had drifted over to fill their heads with ideas of emancipation, equal rights and a bitter hostility to men. Miss Kirby used to tell them that they were talking nonsense and that there was no substitute for marriage, however much they pretended to despise it. *She* was past the age of passion,

and they weren't ; so they hated her for pulling away their pretences and reminding them how unhappy and wasted they really were. . . . When I told her that I wanted to take up teaching, she said, " Not until you've failed at everything else, like the rest of us here." And I think she was more right than the other soured virgins who preached to us against men and marriage . . . and wouldn't admit they'd failed.

3

The next holidays I heard more about Polehampton. The university there wanted a new professor of English, and father had been offered the position. He didn't want to settle down in the Midlands, but he didn't dare refuse the money. The difference between him and mother ! On the first night of the holidays I was so glad to be home that they felt the shock must be broken gently ; and father came to break it. He sauntered round my room, looking at my pictures and pulling my prizes out of the book-case ; my new writing-table that Winnie Orm had given me he quite fell in love with, though it was too big for the room. Then he said :

" I don't know whether you've heard that we're giving up this house. I've been offered an appointment which takes me to Staffordshire and I was up there last week, looking at the new house. You'll have a better room than this—half as big again, I should say." . . .

Poor father ! Trying to bribe me ! And it was so like him to soften the blow while mother was only thinking that, if *she* could stand it, we could stand it too. Father was so sweet and clever that I was quite excited by the prospect of moving. Until the time came ! We'd all been at the sea while the house was being got ready ; and we plunged into Polehampton suddenly, without warning. I shall never forget our journey there ! An evening in autumn, with one horrible manufacturing town after another ; great heaps of coal and refuse with patches of dirty grass between ; inky little streams and canals, black wheels and ropes at the shaft-heads ; and blast-furnaces

that looked like the entrance to Hell, belching flames that seemed to lick the sky. My hair and eyes were full of smuts, my hands and face were smeared with grime. . . .

"We're not going to live *here*!" I cried, when we reached Polehampton and walked, in a nightmare, out of that roaring pitchy station into a cobbled yard filled with broken-down flies and clattering electric tram-cars.

"I'm afraid we are, my dear," father said. "You must try to make the best of it."

"But how long for?" I asked. "Oh, I *can't* live here." . . .

Then mother told me not to worry father and said that, if it was good enough for them (or something of the kind), it was good enough for me.

I thought over that phrase until I went to sleep. . . . We drove out past all the mean shops and the factories into the residential part of Polehampton—the Netley Road, a mile long, with square, red-brick houses on either side and, in the middle, the trams that came swaying and swinging with a crackle of sparks from the cable overhead and a bell that never stopped—"NETLEY—STATION" and "STATION—RECREATION GROUND" alternately. . . . I hadn't stayed in more than four or five houses at that time, and this one of ours seemed tolerable—as a *make-shift*. It was hideously proportioned, but mother had done her best with the curtains and furniture. . . . And I didn't want to be told again that what was good enough for them was good enough for me. Besides, I hadn't begun to realize. . . . It was when I went to bed and saw my own eiderdown and carpet, Winnie Orm's writing-table, my pictures and photographs, book-cases, prizes, all transplanted from my room at Cambridge, that I understood father was seriously trying to make our home here. It *wasn't* good enough for me. . . .

I went into the next room, where Grace and Joan were already in bed, and tried to make them see it; but, if mother or father said a thing to them, they always accepted it. That was the first time I saw that I should have to fight for my own hand even against my family; and I was only sixteen. Grace admitted that it wasn't as nice as

Cambridge, but said we should be away at school most of the time—that was no consolation for me, because I was leaving in another year—; and father had said something about my attending lectures in this horrible university; Joan—she was always the laziest of you all—Joan said we should get used to it in time.

I tried to get used to it. I *had* to, for we were there four years. You were a baby, and those two lumpy creatures were at school near Brighton. I . . . I had to face it in all its horror. Thank God, the lectures killed a good part of each day; and at night I worked like a slave; there was nothing, nothing I wouldn't learn if it would take me out of myself, make me forget Polehampton . . . and shew me a glimmer of hope for the future. Politics and economics, in case *any* one—a politician—wanted a secretary; history and literature, modern languages. . . . *That* was where I laid the foundation of all my knowledge. Father always said that I could get a first in modern history or English literature at any university in the country; working with him, I was brought up in the great English tradition; he taught me such perspective and taste that I afterwards made mincemeat of people like Margaret Poynter who had read nothing earlier than Tennyson, nothing outside their own country. And I made such mincemeat of the girls and boys who attended the same lectures that they were afraid to speak to me! At first, of course, I took the lead, as I had done at school; and they were very anxious that I should help them to create the sort of university atmosphere and spirit that they imagined I'd known at Cambridge.

"It can't be done," I told them. "Polehampton is no more like a university than a Polehampton man is like a gentleman."

Silly. . . . I couldn't afford to make enemies if I had to live in the place or if I wanted an appointment there (father said I was too young to work away from home). And I wanted anything that would enable me to be independent and to forget my surroundings. Will you believe me, I studied metallurgy in the hopes of impressing one of these Black Country brutes?

You were too young to realize the awfulness of those years. In by tram five days a week for lectures, back by tram for lunch, in by tram again to the library, tea in the common room. On Saturday we had tennis ; father and I, the doctor and the vicar ; one week with us, one week with the doctor and so on—with supper, and home by tram. When it was wet, we played badminton in the coach-house. And on other days in summer I used to be invited to join parties on the Recreation Ground ! *You* never knew father's pupils in those days. They were rich, bumptious young cads who'd been sent for a few years to a grammar-school and came to the university to be " finished " ; most of their time was given to the commercial diploma, but their fond parents thought they could make gentlemen of them by paying for just *one* course of English. And that's where father met them ; and, forgetting that he wasn't still at Cambridge, he used to invite them to tea on Sunday. They came in preposterous clothes—red and green check waistcoats, collars like white flower-pots filled with geraniums, tie-pins— ; and they never knew whether it was more impressive to treat me as a barmaid or a Sunday-school teacher. One of them told me that the Students' Committee was going to call the living-room at the Hostel a common room—" to be more like Oxford, you know," he said. I told him that it was an unfortunate name to choose. . . .

In my turn I had to meet them on *their* heath—the Recreation Ground ; as soon as they went into business, they divided their time between " the office " and those lean, black courts, where they played wildly keen tennis for wagers which I wasn't supposed to hear. After Christmas they made up parties for the pantomime : and we were a B-company town. . . . Four years. . . . Four years of that ! And towards the end of the time I used to get letters from Winnie and Joyce, telling me about their first dances and all the men they imagined were in love with them. . . . Sometimes we were lured into dining with these . . . *monsters*—dinners that began at seven, where all the men seemed to wear frock-coats and white satin ties. . . . Troughs of food, oceans of wine. . . . And they tried to interest us

in their business, and the men called their wives "mother". They couldn't see they were something to be ashamed of! They were proud of themselves, of Polehampton! 'We are the great industrial midlands,' they seemed to say: 'we are what has made England great' . . . I'm really not sure that they didn't pity us a little for being 'effete'.

Four years. . . We lived like Spartans because we wanted to save all we could and get *away*. I rebelled once or twice, but I could *do* nothing. If I upset father, it spoilt his work and kept us there all the longer. He was Director of Studies, which meant a few hours' office-work each week, and Professor of English, which meant eight lectures a term; in addition, he took pupils and, in his spare time, finished the *History of the Elizabethan Stage*. I couldn't interrupt that; and it was useless *simply* to grumble, because—after a long fight—he'd said I might try to find work for myself. . . . And I'd failed. That was a lesson I was glad to learn early.

"Here," I said, "am I, young, good-looking, clever, accomplished, miles above every other girl in Polehampton; I shouldn't dream of marrying any one of these clods, but they ought to *want* to marry *me* (I was just beginning to be very conscious of being a woman). If I condescend to apply for a position . . ."

It was the post of Lady Dean. They gave it to a podgy, stupid, fifth-rate girl, because she was so popular with the students. I saw then—I was nineteen—that merit doesn't always win; I saw that a quick tongue frightens the stupid people; I saw that I, too, must learn to be popular. That meant humility and hiding from people that you despised them. I learnt that lesson at nineteen, and after twenty-six years you'll find people saying "I think I *really* like dear Marion Shelley because she's so gentle and unassertive." . . .

"Yes," I always want to say, "like the starving peasant before the revolution; but wait till I have power of life and death over you!"

There were times when I believed we were rooted in Polehampton for all our days. Father thought only of his work; mother was growing so ill and irritable that you

couldn't discuss anything with her ; and no one supported me, though Grace and Joan had fined down into quite pretty girls and must have been as much bored as I was. We were rescued quite unexpectedly. About a year after the *Elizabethan Stage* the Silversmiths' Company endowed a chair of English literature at Oxford ; father was invited to apply for it, and in the summer of '95 we shook off the smuts of Polehampton.

4

I remember that father sent for me on the morning when he heard of his appointment. He talked about the honour and the emoluments. . . . And, as he couldn't go back to Cambridge, how glad he'd be to go to Oxford. . . . Then he talked about mother, and I found that *she'd* been making difficulties. Health. . . . He wouldn't tell me what was the matter, but she was becoming a sort of vague permanent invalid and hated the idea of being uprooted. (I think that was the moment when I first hated her ; until then I'd regarded her patiently, as the act of God.) She'd lost her looks, lost her charm and become fussy, petulant and old—bitterly jealous if any one seemed to intrude between father and her and treating father as though she were his keeper and we were trying to bait him. It was not *our* business, she felt, to be told how ill she was ; and I found it hard to believe how wonderful she had once seemed. . . . If we went to Oxford, father said, I must be prepared gradually to take mother's place. I said I would ! I promised that, as long as I lived under his roof, I'd be wife to him and mother to you all. There's nothing I wouldn't have done to get away from Polehampton.

And I didn't propose to live under his roof any longer than was unavoidable. '95 ; I was twenty ; if we'd stayed on in Staffordshire, I *should* have been old enough now to try for an appointment at one of the big schools ; but that was to surrender everything I'd hoped of life. I remembered Miss Kirby's warning. Oxford ! When I heard that name, I felt that all my bad dreams were over. I'd never been in love, never seen a man I wanted to spend half-an-hour

with ; but I determined to track one down and marry him. I didn't want titles or estates or the great world ; I wanted some man who was a gentleman, presentable, decently dressed, educated, without that appalling Staffordshire accent and all the talk about the "office" and the "ground." I should have been good value, too, for most men, for I was very pretty, with a good figure and the art of wearing clothes well ; I had an amazing equipment of book-knowledge, picked up in desperation at the university ; and I was pathetically anxious to please. Sometimes, even now, I grow hot when I think of the things I did to attract and please men. . . .

And Oxford, I knew, was full of the very people I wanted to meet. We arrived at the end of the summer term, and I could have stretched out my arms to them as we drove to the Banbury Road. Everything that I'd loved about Cambridge came to life again in my heart. They were clean and self-possessed, these boys ; at ease in their delightful untidiness instead of being mute and miserable in flower-pot collars. . . . And twenty was the right age for a man in his last year ; some one who was going into politics ; he had only to meet me in order to see what good value I was giving him. . . . I had a glorious day-dream of the life I meant to create in Oxford (even in those days, you see, my thoughts ran on organizing a splendid circle, with myself radiating light from the centre) ; a life that should be my setting until some one came to carry me off. Mother had handed over the keys without a murmur—except for a little general disparagement—, I could do what I liked with the rest of you, and there's no denying that Grace and Joan did me credit so far as looks were concerned ; if they were content to keep their mouths shut and look beautiful while I supplied the intelligence, I foresaw that we should take Oxford by storm.

If I'd been old enough at Cambridge to remember the official life, I shouldn't have laid up so much needless disappointment for myself. Father, of course, would have had a success anywhere ; but Oxford was already so full of dons' daughters that there was no welcome for three more, especially when one was clever and all three were

pretty. That didn't matter : we should have won through in a fair fight if there'd been any opportunity, but I had no *scope*. For terms and terms we were invited to dine with father's colleagues ; they dined with us ; and I found so much precedence and seniority that we never had a look-in. Social life ! After the formal dinners, our social life was confined to tea-parties where we gossiped about the other girls in North Oxford and repeated *bons mots* that father brought back when he'd dined in hall. You lived the tea-party life—or none at all !

I said to myself that I'd start a ' Young Oxford ' movement ; we had a good-sized house, father never grudged me money for entertaining, and for the first time since we left Cambridge I wasn't ashamed to invite my friends. Mildred Stanley—I knew she'd be the first of us to get off !— ; while we were still at Polehampton I read that she was engaged to a barrister named Burnley, some years older than herself and without much prospects, so some one told me ; and Beatrice Selkirk had gone out to India with her people ; but I had Joyce Armitage and Winnie Orm up during our first year and arranged a tiny dance and some expeditions to which we *didn't* invite all the old women. It didn't do ! My *dear*, it didn't do ! Some one—you never know where these things start—some one said we were ' fast ' ; some one else said it was a pity mother was too ill to exercise any control ; and finally some one said that really, don't you know, this sort of thing (whatever it was) didn't look well in the daughters of one of the professors. After that, father dropped me a hint, and ' Young Oxford ' gave up trying to rejuvenate the social life of the place ; we fell back on more conventional methods ; fell back and failed. . . .

It was later, much later, that I realized I had cut it too fine for any hope of success. A man of twenty-one wants something younger than a girl of twenty-one, especially if she knows more about everything than he does ; he wants somebody that he can shew off to and guide and influence. These boys were frightened of me : though I'd tried, after my rebuff in Polehampton, to learn humility, I suppose I'd been snubbing the clods there too long to drop the habit

in a night. I found that the clever people liked meeting me: we sharpened our wits and bandied epigrams: but the hungry little scholars who were clever enough to appreciate me were too clever to be caught by a don's daughter. And, if I'd caught them, they had no money. The others—well, they just made themselves scarce. I took some time to see it—to see that I'd plenty of solid learning and academic wit but no social arts (where was I to learn them? From father? In Polehampton?); and then it was too late. By the time I'd set myself to become a good hostess, to make people at home instead of striking sparks out of them, to draw them out instead of damning them as bores, I'd missed the tide. I was twenty-one . . . twenty-two. Your undergraduate of twenty-one doesn't want a don's daughter of twenty-two.

It came upon me quite suddenly—this discovery that I'd been kicked upstairs from one generation to another. One year I was invited to Sunday picnics on the Cher; the next I was left out; the next they invited Grace instead of me. She, I knew, couldn't hold her own, and I expected, somehow, they'd come back to me; but, when they tired of her, they gave Joan a trial and, when they tired of Joan, they dropped all three of us together. It was then that I heard we were being described as the Tenby Sisters; *you* began to be seen going about with us, so we were called the Tenby Quartette. I realized that we'd become an Oxford institution. And I knew well enough how the tea-parties watched other girls to guess how they were watching and gossiping about us. . . . There were moments when I was seized with agorophobia and dared not leave home. . . .

That house in the Banbury Road! After I married, I never went back to live there, of course, until father's death, but I suppose it was always the same; you and the others carried on the tradition? The last thing I shall see before I die will be the winding, flagged path up to the front door and the rock-garden on either side. Every time I trod that path I felt like a prisoner going back to his cell after exercise. Rock-gardens were just becoming the fashionable snobbism of the time, and I rolled off a wonderful patter about *cerastium Biebersteinii* and *alyssum*

saxatile and the rest. No one who came to Hillcrest was spared our rock-garden; there was bitter rivalry between mother and a retired clergyman from Boar's Hill; and one day I discovered the mean old beast filling his pockets with cuttings. That became the staple of North Oxford conversation for a week. . . . That garden, and the cold little new-art hall, and the oak dining-room. In those days, if your house *did* happen to look like an up-to-date infirmary, you were honour-bound to jumble up a refectory table and a farm-house settle and a dresser from a cottage and Jacobean chairs. . . . Father's room I liked: it was always just books and sofas and a big fire in winter; I used to lie there dreaming and planning. The drawing-room I only went into on Sundays, when mother made me pour out tea for the undergraduates who honoured us with their company. It was a destination for a walk when they'd overeaten themselves at lunch; they clattered across the floor in their heavy boots and stood round in blue suits, spilling crumbs and asking me if I'd been down to watch "toggers" or hear the last Union debate. And I'd ask if any of them were playing in the O.U.D.S. And then they'd look at their watches and hurry back to chapel. . . .

5

How I dreamed and planned! Father, who never used a chair if he could swing his legs from the edge of a table or perch at the top of a step-ladder, would sit scribbling away with a pad on his knees, running his fingers through his hair and starting an avalanche of books and papers whenever he became excited. And I lay on the hearth-rug or curled myself at one end of the sofa, staring into the fire and just seeing things as they were! Sometimes, when father wanted another book, he'd squeeze my hand or pat my shoulder as he passed; *he* knew what I was thinking about; and, if I caught him staring out of window or drawing patterns on the blotting-paper, I knew what *he* was thinking about. By this time, I suppose, he was confident that he'd have something to leave each of us;

but no one knew how long mother might live, and he couldn't hide from himself that we weren't being given much of a chance. When we lined up, all four of us, for church on Sunday, he looked conscience-stricken, appealing, mutely begging me to find some way out of the difficulty.

I could only help to the extent of facing facts. On my twenty-third birthday I said to myself: "You're out of the running now for undergraduates, though you must still do your best for your sisters; for *you* there remain the younger dons and any chance friends of your father's." It was not an exhilarating prospect! Penniless boys of five-and-twenty, who couldn't marry without jeopardizing their fellowships, and father's contemporaries from Durham or Edinburgh! Still, I worked indefatigably to keep the house filled with men of any age who would do for any of us; and, if you ever wonder why I'm hard or when I lost my bloom, you can trace it back to those years when I *humbled* myself to make cock-sure undergraduates run the gauntlet of dining with us—once!

One or two of them became fairly intimate—for a time. You see, they all loved father and used to ask him to lunches and dinners; mother never went anywhere, so they invited me instead, but always as some one who could talk and make a success of their parties, always as some one of an older generation. There came a time when I definitely realized that they'd put me on the shelf. Every year we got up a party for the Infirmary Ball: three or four of our more long-suffering friends graciously consented to come with us if we fed them first and paid for their tickets (we, of course, had money to *burn* after paying for dresses, gloves, shoes. . .); every year I tried to break free of my frame and make them see me as a woman, a girl who danced well and was amusing to talk to, not the daughter of the Silversmith Professor, a North Oxford oddity. They hadn't enough imagination; I was always the tea-pouring member of the Tenby Quartette. . . .

And, whenever I *began* to have a little bit of a success, mother spoilt it. I suppose she too saw I'd missed the tide and was determined to make one last desperate effort; besides, Grace and Joan were coming on. If ever

she *fancied* that a man liked any of us, she gave him no peace. Dinner . . . and she always thanked him loudly for that *wonderful* picnic which we *had* enjoyed so much ; thank God, I couldn't play a note, or she'd have chained me to the piano for the unhappy creature's edification ; after dinner, of course, he had to call, and then mother snared him with a tennis-party, taking no refusal and going on " Monday ? Tuesday ? Wednesday ? " until he capitulated or else said he was going away before his schools. If he *did* come, mother always tried to drive us into a corner together, and the man was never allowed to go until he'd fixed a date for coming again ; but as a rule he wrote very apologetically to say that, when he accepted Mrs. Tenby's *most* kind invitation, he'd *quite* forgotten that he was already engaged. I called those our " passing belle " letters. . . . And, if we met again, the young man was always very much embarrassed.

If *he* saw it and *we* saw it, you may be quite sure that other people saw it as well. Among undergraduates *and* in North Oxford we became a byword ; mother's frantic efforts to marry us off made an institution of *her* ; I heard a few of the things that were said about us and I could imagine the rest. Well, I'd long ago decided that there was no room in my life for pride, but I had my vanity to consider : no one can afford to be ridiculous, and I decided that, if I didn't capture one of the younger dons or the stray scholars who came to see father professionally, I must revert to Miss Kirby's counsel of despair and look about for some teaching appointment.

First of all, I considered the dons in the abstract : they were gentlemen, they were educated, their minds were in harmony with mine, and some of them would in time be professors and heads of colleges ; on the other hand, they had very little money, they were accustomed to a very pleasant bachelor life—living in college, dining in hall, going to their common rooms, travelling in the vacations— ; if I married one of them, it would mean an end of all this, and we should have to start on very small means—in North Oxford. I should have to make friends with all the people I'd allowed myself to despise and hate ; I

should really have to take an interest in boat-races and steeple-chases and what the O.U.D.S. were going to do this year, because that would be my life. I should belong to North Oxford. And perhaps we should have children, daughters, four of them; perhaps we too should have to sell ourselves into slavery at a place like Polehampton. . . .

I shivered, but I didn't altogether reject the idea; I was beginning to see that I wasn't in a position to reject things because they didn't quite come up to my ideal standard. The alternatives. . . Well, I could try to earn my own living; something educational, a girls' school. I thought of King's Norton and the mistresses there, clever and pretty, growing gradually faded, all of them disappointed women except one or two who were without sex, most of them soured, subsisting on the absurd devotion of infatuated fifteen-year-olds. Most kinds of marriage, I thought then, were preferable to that. . . .

Then I studied, in the abstract, the friends who came to stay with father. Some were men of his own standing in other universities, as a rule already married; some were old pupils from Clare, just beginning to make their mark; the rest were a miscellany of authors, critics, journalists and casual friends, married and single, prosperous and out-at-elbows; they came because they were fond of him or because they wanted him to write an introduction or read the proofs of a book or tell them where to find certain authorities. For a week or two at the end of every term the house was filled with them; and those were the only times when I was happy. They brought with them an air of the great world, they could talk, they treated me as an equal till I forgot to grizzle about the hopelessness of North Oxford. One year father and Lee-Squire and I sat round a table, drawing up the acting edition of *The Alchemist*; we planned the Cavendish Reprints, and I drafted the prospectus. . . .

One year, too, I remember father's saying, "Don't forget Martin Shelley's coming to-night. I should put out an extra bottle of whisky. And for Heaven's sake tell him that he mustn't keep me up later than two."

CHAPTER TWO

I

THAT was my first meeting with Martin.

I'd heard of him, of course, long before he was famous as a critic ; father always considered him his most brilliant pupil. After winning every possible prize at Cambridge, he had gone to London and written plays, novels, short stories ; father used to say he could have made a fortune by his pen, but he was always so full of ideas and enthusiasms that he dashed from one thing to another and, having a few hundreds of his own, he was too lazy to publish anything. He'd been a personality, too, at Cambridge ; and he was a personality in London ; that rather spoilt him and made him care more for the figure he cut than for the work he did. Following on Clement Scott and George Augustus Sala and Willie Wilde, he wanted to eclipse them all and make himself the Colossus of Fleet Street. Father tried to dissuade him and told him that he'd win a bigger reputation if he stuck to his books and left journalism alone ; but it was no good. The *Night Gazette* offered him the post of dramatic critic on his own terms ; he pretended that he wanted father's advice, but I'm sure he only came to boast about the offer and to find out how much he dared ask for.

I was disappointed at first, after hearing so much about him. He was short and rather fat in those days, with a very red face and black hair combed forward to a straight fringe ; the moment we met, he began paying me marked attention, but, as he did the same thing a few minutes later with Grace and then with Joan, I didn't feel that I'd achieved any great success. And I *loathed* being pawed.

Between tea and dinner he flagged and became positively boring ; then he brightened up. And after dinner, when the furnaces had been well stoked, you had Martin Shelley as he will go down to history. Though I never met Oscar Wilde, I should say that Martin hadn't his brilliancy of whim ; but for suggesting, illuminating, *inspiring*. . . I've never heard anything like it before or since : such wit, such knowledge all so beautifully accessible, such delicacy of discernment, such power of illustration, such humour and fun. . . . I don't know when I went to bed that night. Mother slipped away as usual ; Grace and Joan looked on for a time as though he were a performing animal ; I just sat spell-bound while he poured forth ideas. . . . In those days he never became affected by what he drank ; one whisky-and-soda followed another, there was one cigarette after another, and, if anything, he only seemed more brilliant. A short, tremendous Rabelaisian figure, growing more and more disputatious, entering the lists with pen for lance and pantomime dragon for horse. . . . Towards the end I joined in a little bit ; and I think I was rather a surprise to him. If you had *nothing* to say, he'd make you talk well ; and, as it happened, I had plenty to say. I thought, I *hoped*, I was making an impression ; when I said good-night, he bowed very low and kissed my hand ; but in the morning everything had evaporated, and he was only rather irritable because he'd overslept himself. After that one meeting I didn't see him for six months.

Martin rather took the colour out of father's other friends. I still studied them, in the abstract ; but none had his brilliance and promise, none was so attractive personally—apart from the whisky and the everlasting cigarettes—, very few had achieved his position. At the same time, I was beginning to think that it must be one of them or nothing, and I began to study them not quite so much in the abstract. . . .

Then came my last Infirmary Ball. Mother was a patroness, and we talked of nothing else for most of the term. After the figure of fun that she had made of us all, I said I wouldn't go. Joyce Armitage had invited me to spend Christmas and the New Year in London ; and I was in

no hurry to get back. There was an endless wrangle, because the tickets had been bought and the usual dinner-party was pretty well arranged. I said that Grace and Joan could go; but I was tired of these dances and would rather stay at home, if I were back in Oxford. Mother insisted that I must come home for the ball, and father said the same.

"You haven't invited a man for me," I told them, as a last line of defence, "and I'm sure I don't want you to."

"Spenser Woodrow will be staying here then," said mother, with the exaggerated carelessness she always employed in speaking of a man that she had dragged by brute force into the house.

I liked young Woodrow. He had lately been elected to a history research fellowship and was coming to work with father on some branch of seventeenth-century political pamphlets. We got on quite well together, because he was too much wrapped up in his work to make love to me, and, up to that time, I hadn't tried to make him: I was still frightened by the idea of having to spend all my life in Oxford. But I knew he didn't dance; all the other scheming mothers had been trying to make him.

"If you want me to keep him amused," I said, "I will; but, if he doesn't dance, why drag him to the ball when we can talk just as well at home?"

"It's so silly to waste the tickets," mother said for about the twentieth time.

I gave in and said I'd go.

Only a woman would ruin her life rather than waste a guinea ticket. .

2

The Armitages *did* invite me to stay on . . . as I expected. And I wrote to mother for her permission; and she gave it, not at all as I expected. Father gave it, too, and I guessed that they'd been talking about me and agreeing that I was living a pretty dull life. It was only a question of another week; and, if I'd stayed, everything

would have been different. I don't know why I didn't ; perhaps there was just a hint of reluctance in father's letter—and he asked so little that I did *try* to do what he wanted—, perhaps my course had been marked out beforehand so that I stumbled blindly wherever I was intended to go. I don't know ; and it doesn't matter now.

I remember—it was destiny having a laugh at me, I suppose—, I remember debating half the night whether I should stay. I was enjoying myself wildly. Old Armitage was a rich stockbroker and the commonest human being I have ever seen with the exception of his wife ; but, if they were common, they were clever, quite clever enough to give Joyce the best possible chance and to realize how common they were. After King's Norton they had sent her to Girton and given her a year's polish abroad, so that, when I came to stay with them this time, I found that she was teaching them all the new tricks that they'd paid to have her taught : their list of friends had been searchingly scrutinized, old Armitage no longer tucked his napkin into his collar, and he'd been broken of calling it a *serviette*. I thought Joyce was doing too miraculously well—until I found that she'd hired my old friend Miss Kirby to give her a few hints.

I expect I benefited by them at second-hand to some extent ; and I certainly benefited directly by old Armitage. He had traces of decent feeling about him and always insisted that Joyce and I should run level : when at last he'd bribed some one to present her, he said I must be presented too ; and, when I blushed and said I hadn't the money for a dress, he said that I was being presented to please him, to keep Joyce company, and of *course* I must allow him to make me a present of the dress. . . . He was a vulgar old thing and used to chew tooth-picks till I felt physically sick ; but he had *heart*. . . . As I've grown older, I've learnt to discount good manners ; I've seen too much of them, they cover so much rottenness. People would tell you *I* had good manners !

What was I talking about ? Oh, Joyce. Yes, she made a good show, for it's never easy to present two aspects of yourself at the same time, and she had to carry me into

this new life, with all my knowledge of the old, without admitting that there'd been a change of any kind. In my honour she invited Mildred Stanley—Mildred Burnley she was now—and her husband; and Winnie Orm; but she gave us a marvellous dinner at Prince's and took us to the best seats for *Florodora* and then on to supper at the Savoy, in such a way that the Burnleys didn't dare ask her back to their little flat in Hammersmith; if you can't find any other way of killing a friendship you've outgrown, you can usually kill it by kindness, and I learnt from her that old friends are sometimes a great handicap when you're climbing the social scale. She was content to keep Winnie and me so long as we didn't make disastrous marriages.

And I was content to accept her precarious friendship for the good time it gave me with theatres and parties and for the experience I gained by watching her. If she could do it, I could do it; if I hadn't her father's money to help me, I hadn't her father to hinder me. At school we'd neither of us pretended to be of the class that constitutes "society"; we were the best of the *bourgeoisie* and, if we'd attempted anything higher, we should have considered ourselves the worst kind of snobs. I now discovered that Joyce was only undecided whether to say she was already in society or to proclaim that she would never rest till she got there. It was the last days of Queen Victoria's reign; the old divisions were being broken down; money opened almost every door, and, if in addition to being rich you were as bright and pretty as Joyce, you could get almost anywhere. Scores, hundreds of girls were pushing themselves in the same way from one social grade to another; she couldn't resist shewing off to me a little bit; and, though I didn't believe her at first when she reeled off all her grand names, I very soon found that she really *was* being accepted at her own valuation.

I can't remember all the parties she took me to; but I remember very distinctly standing by myself in a corner at Lady Dexon's, knowing not a soul, seeing all the people I had read about in the papers and *finding Joyce accepted as one of them!* At first I was furious at being neglected, and I swore that, if I ever had the opportunity, I would

punish her so that she never forgot it, but in my heart I knew she was too useful ; then I tried to discount her by saying to myself that she was a pushful, middle-class little nobody, but there was no disguising the fact that she'd got there. Then I said I would get there too.

I wonder why . . .

Every one has a strain of snobbishness, whether it's for titles, money, celebrities or the fashion of the moment : for all his other-world air, Arthur likes to be seen walking with a bishop ; and, when you two have been dining at the palace, you take care to let every one know. I can't explain the psychology of it. You add to your own importance, I suppose, if you know important people ; you come to feel superior if you're friends with the exclusive people who try to keep to themselves ; but, while you're calling them by their Christian names, you have to confess that they're no more amusing than any one else. I can speak from experience, for there's not one of them, man or woman, who hasn't been to my house ; but *they* came to *me* ; and, when I said I would "get there too," I wasn't collecting broken-down duchesses, I wanted the people who combined to form the active life of the country and who lived spaciouly, without the pettiness and the squalid cares that stunt the middle-classes. That was the difference between Joyce and me, though to the world I've no doubt we seemed to be playing an identical game ; there were always a few to say that I forced my way into society by the back-door of literature. But I don't care now what any one says. . . .

Joyce had made wonderful progress in a short time and was determined that I should see it. I owe to her my first meeting with the Duchess of Ross ! She took me to a literary party at the Maurice Maitlands', and I saw for the first time how grotesquely ill-managed these things were in London, what ignorant charlatans too the people like Connie Maitland were. At the same time it was a dazzling contrast to the life I'd been leading in Oxford ; and, though it wasn't quite what I wanted, it made me feel that I could never again go back to tea-parties with our neighbours, man-hunts with you three and squabbles with

mother. I studied Joyce's methods and learnt something from them. She wisely left her parents at home and sallied forth like a figure cut out of its frame, without any kind of natural background ; that was worth knowing at a time when you could first count on being taken for your looks and your charm without awkward enquiries into your antecedents, you couldn't do that until Victorianism had passed away. Then she put herself in the hands of a woman with many relations, little money and no scruples, until she'd made an artificial background for herself (I used to hear people explaining her : " Joyce Armitage ? Oh, I should have thought you *must* have met her at the Brookstyns'. She's a cousin or niece or something of Evie Brookstyn, I believe " . . .) ; and finally she encouraged a highly-placed young fortune-hunter to fall in love with her. I never knew whether she cared two pins for him ; but he carried her the rest of the way, forcing open the doors that still resisted her. They became engaged a few months later, and I felt she had no further heights to climb ; but the engagement was broken off either because the young man could not face old Armitage as a father-in-law or because he found some other girl better worth his while. The blow to her pride nearly killed Joyce : she hid herself away and emerged later with an insane hatred of all men. That was the last lesson she taught me : if you want to succeed in anything, you must keep your affections out of it.

If Joyce seemed to be carrying everything before her, I had quite a success on my own account ; I always *did*, whenever I came to stay with her, for I'd taught myself to be very fascinating, and London gave me the chance I needed. In every house people used to say, " Who is the tall, fair girl with Joyce Armitage ? " and most of them added what a sweet face I had or how beautifully I carried myself. Very soon—I was only there a fortnight—I was receiving invitations from all sorts of people till Joyce became a little jealous ; on the first day she'd talked about taking me to the Riviera and paying my expenses, but by the end she was saying that her plans were very uncertain. (If you want a definition of the perfect tyrant, I

should say 'a *young* woman with money'.) It must have been that, I think, that decided me to return home ; the old people begged me to stay, but Joyce didn't like me to take the wind out of her sails and she hated not being able to patronize me.

And, however much I was enjoying myself, I was quite ready to go. I'd proved to my own satisfaction that I could have a success at parties and that, as soon as I was known, men and women hurried up to speak ; Joyce had proved for my benefit that any one with determination and personal charm could get on in London ; and I had made up my mind that, as an opportunity was all I needed, she should give me the opportunity as soon as she had forgotten her pique at my modest little triumph. She pretended to be quite sorry when I said I was going back to Oxford, and we arranged that I should come up in the spring and do the season with her ; it would suit us both very well, for she had much more freedom when we went about together . . . and I could make certain of my opportunity.

For a fortnight . . . my first experience of success and power . . . the prospect of a wonderful life . . . the escape from Hillcrest and the family into that large air. . . I suppose I was happy then.

3

I reached home just in time to dress ; and of the night, the ball, the people I remember nothing . . . except Spenser Woodrow. I suppose we dined first, I suppose Joan and Grace had partners. When I came downstairs, there were certainly three men in the dining-room ; and, as they went to get their coats, Spenser stopped to say :
" You *do* look ripping in that cloak ! "

I was tired and rather depressed at getting back to the family. I wanted to think about the time I'd had in London, the time I was going to have ; it didn't occur to me that there was anything that night to look forward to in Oxford, and I'd not exerted myself to be agreeable

to any one. He hadn't either, if it comes to that ; though he'd been working with father all the term before, this was the first time he'd noticed me, but, while we waited in the hall for the fly, he evidently decided that I was worth a little trouble : the other men were just fidgeting and trying to think what to say and which to say it to, but Spenser came to me like an arrow from a bow :

" I feel an awful fraud, you know," he whispered : " my dancing's so execrable that it's kindest to say I don't dance at all."

" Well, I don't want to dance much," I said, " but mother's a patroness, so we have to put in an appearance. I shall leave at midnight."

He was beginning to stammer something about supper, when the fly drove up and we were shepherded inside.

I forget who was supposed to be chaperoning us. I forget almost everything. . . . What's *your* first memory of him, Ada ? Spenser, I mean. You must have been ten by this time, and there was soon so much chatter about us that I'm sure you kept your eyes open whenever he came to Hillcrest. I remember him as such an extraordinary *boy*, though he must have been six- or seven-and-twenty, and his hair was retreating from his forehead. *Such* a good forehead, dominating the whole of that narrow face. . . All his features were good, though he looked a little too much of the Red Indian to be quite handsome ; too severe, till you saw his eyes. They were the best thing about him ; grey, wide-set and steady, oh, and *shining* with sheer joy of living ! His vitality blew like a clean wind through that house of death ; everything was the wildest joke to him : his work with father, this ball, mountaineering—he was off to Switzerland for a fortnight before the beginning of term—, everything ; and you *saw* it, in the wonderful radiance of his eyes.

I was careful to look out of the window, but I felt them on me. When *you've* always had to spread the net, it's almost intoxicating to know that some one admires you and is interested in you without any effort on your part : it makes you sure of yourself, even if it makes you rather cruel. I simply *dawdled* in the cloak-room, letting Grace

and Joan go on without me, because I knew that Spenser would wait and I wanted to make him wait as a sop to my vanity and a punishment for all the slights I'd had from other men. And, when I came out, I wasted more time by rushing up to all the women I knew, pretending not to see him and allowing other people to ask me for dances before I noticed his existence. If he wanted me, he must break through the ring and fight for me. . . . As he did, in the end. . . .

"Now, will you sacrifice *one* to sitting out with me and talking?" he begged, when at last I condescended to see him.

"If I have one left," I said. "You should have come before. I'm afraid you'll find me rather tired for talking."

"On second thoughts, I don't want to talk," he said. "I just want to look at you."

He'd been examining me very carefully, and I saw he admired my dress; though I knew he admired me, too, it was delicious to be told it.

"You can do that while I'm dancing," I suggested.

"But I can't see you without telling you how ripping you look," he answered; "and I can't shout that across the ball-room."

He was shouting it over enough of the ball-room to make every one turn round and smile, so I led him away and we sat down out of sight, while the dowagers glared after us through their lorgnettes. At first he didn't realize that he was falling in love with me; I was a pretty girl, he was in tearing spirits and, if he hadn't flirted with me, he'd have looked for some one else. I was just the most attractive thing he'd met so far; and, though I'd done nothing to excite his admiration, I knew that, if I wanted to keep it, I must stir myself. We talked. . . and I caught the infection of his vitality. You know how easy it is with people who are enjoying themselves; you begin to enjoy yourself, and that makes you talk better . . . and look better. It was a delicious flirtation, and neither took the other seriously. We got on magnificently until a couple walked past and I heard one say:

"That was number eight, wasn't it?"

"Lord!" cried Spenser in dismay. "Here, I must take you back."

We'd already been sitting out for two hours! And I'd cut half a dozen partners, including the other two men who had dined with us; and Spenser had cut Grace and Joan at least once each. They were dancing when we reached the ball-room, and, as I didn't want to face my chaperon, I said:

"I'm sure you can manage this, if you don't try to reverse. You can back me down the room when you're giddy."

I shewed him as best I could. He was rather stiff and rather unreliable, as he held me so loosely that I nearly swung out of his arms until I told him to hold me tighter. We cannoned a few people, and he trampled on me a bit, but he was improving steadily. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"By Jove, I believe I've got it!"

And he really had. We went quicker and quicker, more and more certainly, until I almost lost consciousness; the music in the distance, his arm at my back, pressing me to him, our bodies moving in perfect harmony. . . It was like a dream; and I found myself praying that it would never end, that he would never let go of me. I'd told myself that he was falling a little bit in love with me; but now I was in love with *him*: I wanted to pull his head down to my breast and kiss his eyes, I wanted to be crushed in his arms. And then I felt that in another moment I should faint. I purposely put my heel through a flounce of my dress and begged him to stop.

"It was *my* fault! I did it," I said, when he began to apologize.

I couldn't look at him . . . I wondered whether he noticed any change in my voice. . . I dawdled as long as I decently could in being sewn up; and, by the time I came back to him, I'd regained control of myself. I looked at him as coolly as when we met before dinner; and I could see a change in him. In his eyes, in his voice. . . Such radiance and tenderness. . . He was in love with me, too, and my heart bounded as I saw it; something had

come to me at last, something that I'd dreamed of finding since I was a tiny child. . . . Dear God, something that in my blindness I'd been ready to throw away for the vulgar satisfaction of being married. . . . And I had the advantage of him, he didn't know that I was in love, and I needn't tell him until it suited me. In all the world there's no sense of power to equal that. So long as I kept at a distance, I could preserve my self-control and make him do anything I liked.

"You'll never be able to say again that you can't dance," I told him.

"You're *going* to give me another one, *aren't* you?" he begged.

"Don't you think you ought to ask Grace and Joan?" I suggested.

He grew very red at my little snub and at once began looking about for them. By that time, of course, their programmes were full; and they both snubbed him for cutting their earlier dances. When he came back, ever so humbly, I was graciousness personified and told him that he might take me in to supper; but I kept him on tenter-hooks—and made Grace and Joan furious—by breaking up the party and going home immediately afterwards. He shouldn't have too much of me all at once! And I made him responsible for turning out the lights and went up to bed without giving him a chance of saying good-night to me alone.

Then at last I could let myself go. It was love, my first love! I was bathed in it as though I'd been wrapped in a silken flame. I laughed and cried with it, I whispered his name over and over again. And I thanked God that I'd waited for it. If one of these children who came to tea on Sundays had married me, if I'd married one of father's old pupils! I didn't care now about Oxford or London, I'd have gone back to Polehampton to be with Spenser. . . .

Two o'clock chimed in the hall; three o'clock. . . . I wondered what he was doing; oh, and I *hoped* he hadn't been able to sleep. . . . Once a board creaked in the passage, a door closed; I sprang out of bed to see what was happening and discovered a note half-way under my door.

" You went upstairs without giving me time to thank you for the most wonderful evening of my life. I shall continue to say I can't dance—unless you will dance with me. Whether I shall ever forgive you for running away so early depends on the reparation you make during the next week. I wish I had not promised to go to Switzerland."

The words were ridiculous, but it wasn't ridiculous that he'd felt forced to write them. I pictured him pacing to and fro, sitting down, jumping up, sitting down again, perhaps pouring out his soul in page after page, just for the joy of writing to me, getting into communication with me by hook or by crook, tracing my name on the paper with every embellishment of love. . . . And then he would tear it all up when he'd seen how beautiful it looked. But still he wasn't satisfied! Some little word that would actually reach me; something that I should read next day before anything else. . .

And I hadn't betrayed myself! For all he knew I should laugh at him. He wished he had not promised to go to Switzerland, indeed! If I said 'Stay here,' he would have stayed. . . .

I heard that creak again; and again a door closed. This time it was a longer letter, far less ambiguous:

" My dove has not returned to me! Then you're awake too? I'm glad and sorry: glad to think that, though I can't see you, we are awake side by side, perhaps looking out at the same silver moon and, I'm sure, watched over and blessed by her; but sorry, frantic, mad to think that so many hours must pass before we meet. Dear lady, what have you done with me? Am I mad? You have taken possession of me; and, if I cannot speak to you, I must write. Would to God that I could think anything I wrote welcome to you! Be that as it may, I must go on writing. What happened to-night? Or, rather, what happened before to-night? I have forgotten everything that I was, everything that I did until you suddenly dawned on my life. I had seen you before, but I must have been blind." . . .

And so he went on. *He*, then, had never met love before. In those days I fancied that it must always be like this, but I've since learnt that no life has room for more than one great passion. It's our single chance. God gives us one glimpse of infinity. . . .

And one man in a thousand takes it : the rest think that it will come back. . . .

4

I didn't sleep much that night. . . .

In the morning I schooled and drilled myself. Though I was on fire to make sure he was all I'd pictured him in my visions, I determined that he should woo me as woman had never been wooed before : I would mock him, misunderstand him, madden him, always holding myself aloof until neither of us could bear it longer. And then . . . I would yield as woman had never before yielded to man, with all my heart and soul gushing forth in one great outburst of surrender. Passion. . . It was something new to me, something that scorched all my old calculations and blasted away all my old discontent.

I stayed in my room all the morning, though I could see him prowling in the garden instead of working. After those two letters he had burnt his boats, but I couldn't allow him to force me to a decision until I'd enjoyed his love a little longer ; hadn't I waited all my life for it ? And I should only make him wait a week. I didn't want to be alone with him yet, I had to be niggardly of myself. When we met at lunch, I talked across him to mother about the ball and who'd been there. Spenser hung on my lips as though every word was a jewel. I thought mother *must* have seen, even if Grace hadn't told her—to punish me for bringing them all home so early. . . . After lunch father went for his usual walk by the upper river ; Spenser at once asked to join us, when he heard I was going, so I invited Grace and Joan, and we went out like a choir school. . . . Poor Spenser ! He was furious, for I only gave him about five minutes of myself at the very end, just long enough for him to cast

back to the night before and say he hoped I'd forgiven him for tearing my dress. I said he *hadn't* torn my dress and then I asked him about the work he was doing with father. . . .

That *maddened* him! He looked at me with flashing eyes and then turned his head with a jerk and stalked along in silence, for all the world like a Red Indian going to be burnt alive! Oh, and I was *glad*, because a man's not in love till he can lose his temper; if I'd ever doubted, I knew now that it wasn't a mere flirtation. And I had to make certain before I committed myself by an inch. . . .

"You *read* my two notes?" he asked, as we came in sight of Hillcrest.

"I wondered what you meant by them."

"Wasn't that fairly clear?"

"You talked about the moon," I reminded him. "I wondered whether you were moon-struck."

He walked on, hitting at pebbles and whirling his stick till it sang in the air.

"I was," he growled, between his teeth.

"You'll recover. . . ." And then I laughed at him.

"Really, if I'd thought your first party would go to your head like this, I wouldn't have let mother invite you. Too much excitement is bad for the young; it will spoil your work."

That was my revenge for the cool way he'd been coming to our house all the term and bolting off to father's study as soon as he'd had tea, without deigning to notice me.

"Curse my work!" muttered Spenser.

"You told me it was your whole life."

"I *thought* so once."

"I expect you're *overworked*," I said gently. "When you've had your holiday in Switzerland——"

"Curse Switzerland!" said Spenser.

"You don't make conversation very easy," I laughed.

At that he turned and faced me:

"Why won't you take me seriously?"

"Because you tell me you're moon-struck. Those notes——"

"You don't believe I meant them?"

"You may have. Mr. Shelley, who was staying with us last term, always adopts the religion of the house he's staying in and makes love to the woman he's talking to."

"And you think I'm like that?"

"I hardly know you," I answered. "What I *do* know about you rather——"

"Makes you despise me?" suggested Spenser.

"Amuses me," I answered.

That made him so angry that I don't know what would have happened if father and the others hadn't come up at that moment. We went in to tea, and Spenser tried to pull himself together; but, by ill-luck, Mrs. Jacomb came in half-way through to enquire how we were after the dance. Though I'd hardly realized it before, she had been chaperoning us; and she insisted on teasing Spenser about his dancing and my dress. For terms and terms he'd always said he wasn't a dancing man, so there was quite a flutter when he suddenly began—and then cut every one else to dance with me. Fool of a woman! . . .

"I don't think Mr. Woodrow quite liked what you were saying," I told her as she went away.

"Well, really, my dear, he has only himself to blame," she said. "And you've made such a conquest that you mustn't mind a little chaff. However, if you don't like it . . . Young people in love always *will* take themselves so seriously!"

"But—I'd hardly spoken to him before last night," I said.

"Then you've done a great deal in a short time, my dear. You may consider yourself lucky. Let me know as soon as you have any news."

It was my turn to be angry now. A glorious romance with Spenser, the blooming of our love day by day was a very different thing from a prosaic engagement engineered under the eyes of North Oxford. I might consider myself 'lucky,' indeed! Why couldn't these wretched women leave us alone? I had only six days before Spenser went abroad. . . .

That night after dinner he sat down by my side in the drawing-room. Joan had gone to bed early, father was

working, and Grace was at the piano. She was playing some of the waltzes we'd danced to the night before, and I don't know to this day whether it was a coincidence or malice or some vague idea of helping me by making Spenser sentimental; probably that, for we were always loyal when there was a love-affair to be forwarded, and—by the mercy of heaven—we'd never hunted the same quarry.

"Am I forgiven?" asked Spenser very humbly.

"There's nothing to forgive," I said, as I made room for him on the sofa.

As I smiled at him, his eyes lit up and devoured me like a flame. He apologized for his rudeness, violence, ill-temper. . . . The joy of abasing himself before me! He had been mad, he was mad still, but would I *ever* take him seriously, *ever* believe him?

"What do you want me to believe?" I asked.

"That I love you! That some day I hope you may come to care for me."

"I'll believe that," I promised.

"And w-will you . . . some day?" he stammered.

Then . . .

I put my elbows on my knees and looked at him over the tips of my fingers, frowning a little, perplexed, but so wonderfully tender and understanding that his eyes grew big and filled with tears before I'd done.

"I think that depends on you," I said. "Yesterday we were young, foolish; we'd gone to that ridiculous ball to enjoy ourselves, it didn't matter what we said. When you sent me that first note, I saw that you were—well, my very dear friend, let's still call it 'moon-struck'. Then came the second note . . . and I realized. I told you this afternoon that I hardly knew you. I don't know you yet. *Don't hurry things!* You hope that, some day, I may come to care for you. Perhaps. . . But if you ask me *now!* Absurd! I—don't—*know*—you. But I know that you like being with me; and I quite like being with you. *Don't spoil it by being impatient!*"

Spenser gave a slow, immense sigh that ended in a quaver like a sob choked down.

"Thank you," he said; and then, with timid desperation, "Thank you, Marion."

Some time later I remember that Grace stifled a yawn and said she was going to bed. Spenser besought her to go on playing, and we sank back into the incredible soft warmth of intimacy; he told me how love had come to him, like a great white light that shone through his body, melting his bones and scorching his flesh; what he'd said, what he'd thought when he realized it and wrote to me for fear of dying or going mad. . . . He told me about himself and his mother, his school days at Uppingham, his postmastership at Merton, his first in history, the research fellowship; I heard about his friends, his mother's cottage in Gloucestershire, his expeditions to Switzerland. He went there every winter with the same party: an old school friend from Cambridge, an army coach and his wife, and a mother and her daughter named Sefton. Of course, I betrayed no curiosity about Julia Sefton, but he discounted her so earnestly that you might have supposed she was an indiscretion to be concealed. I didn't contribute very much: he was content that I should listen, and I was content to sit and watch the changing lights in his eyes—grey and cold, then suddenly soft and big, charged with laughter. . . .

Grace played and played until her fingers became glued to the notes and her head drooped forward. I'm sure, now, she was doing it to help. . . . And she'd have gone on playing if father hadn't come in and said:

"D'you care about a drink, Woodrow?"

Then I said I must go to bed. As I went to shut the windows, Spenser came to help me. His hand covered mine and pressed it; I heard him whisper:

"Thank God for you!"

And I smiled at him over my shoulder and whispered back:

"Be patient!"

5

Being in love. . .

The wonderful thing, when you've *made* the discovery

and seen the whole world bathed in a sunset glow—sunset, not sunrise ; you want to swoon away with that sunset glow in your eyes and dream of the dawn ; the ecstasy of love is in the future ; love dies when it is satisfied—the wonderful thing is not the triumph, not the joy of being wanted, not the sensual pleasure of letting yourself be kissed, not even the heaven-sent tenderness that makes you for the first time equal with God ; it's the companionship, the mystic understanding of souls, which you share with no one. In all our vulgar marriage-service the one thing beautiful to me is the symbolism of that moment when the bride throws back her veil and walks down the church on her husband's arm : they've sworn a pact, it's the two of them against all the mob herded into the pews on either side, she depends on him alone and shares everything with him.

I'd never before had any one to share my life with, never any one to whom I mattered more than all the world, never any one who had to share everything with me. Though we were living in the same house, Spenser wrote to me twice a day : one letter, when he was supposed to be working with father, which he pushed under my door at night as he went to dress ; and one in the morning as he went to his bath. I'd never had love-letters before ; and, though I can laugh now—at least, I think I can—, there was nothing absurd then in his outpourings about all the thoughts that came to him in the night. They were his safety-valve ; and, when he'd written them, he could behave quite rationally in the presence of other people, which was very necessary if I was to make the best of my time. When we met, I shewed him by a smile whether I was pleased, whether he could score up a few yards' progress for himself ; and sometimes I withheld the smile to make him try harder. I never sent an answer for fear of bringing everything to a head and entering into a conspiracy which mother or one of you would have noticed ; that joy of being wanted, the pretence that I was yielding inch by inch against my will were too precious. . . .

Perhaps you all noticed, and I was too blind to see. I know that, from the first moment of the ball, we were

being discussed from one end of North Oxford to the other ; and, though mother very seldom went out, she had a genius for hearing all the tea-party gossip. I remember that my eyes were opened when I met Mrs. Jacomb in the street and she insisted on taking me back to tea. . . , Mrs. Jacomb ! I wonder what's happened to her ! She was an unsuccessful woman who refused to become disappointed : the wife of a private coach, with no official position in Oxford, existing on sufferance and making herself very busy and prominent for fear of being elbowed out altogether ; she had a passion for committees and always posed as the tolerant, disillusionized woman of the world among the innocent academics of North Oxford. Oh, and she was devastatingly brave and cheerful !

"Well, my dear," she began meaningly, as she bustled about her stuffy little lodgings in Walton Street. They couldn't afford a servant, though Jacomb reviewed for several papers in addition to taking pupils. "We've all been waiting for the announcement."

"What a hurry you're in !" I laughed, though I could have killed her for undressing my romance and gloating over it.

"What's the hitch ?" she asked briskly. "Money ? One advantage of Oxford is that it's a poor place, every one knows every one else's income pretty well, and you're not expected to pretend. People sometimes wonder how we make both ends meet, but I always say no girl can afford *not* to be married."

As she jerked out her questions and advice I thought of Miss Kirby and her thin-lipped, wintry little smile at the other King's Norton mistresses who pretended that they valued their emancipation so highly ! The women of forty who had succeeded, the women who had failed, all agreed that anything was better than fighting through life single-handed. Anything ! Mrs. Jacomb's shabby, utilitarian clothes ; these furnished rooms with everything hard and brilliant in the gas-light, everything either stuffy or cold, the wearisome drudgery, the small return. We *should* be able to keep servants, but this glimpse of Mrs. Jacomb's life suddenly frightened me : when I'd ordered

the meals for the day I should have nothing to do ; nothing but jobs that I made for myself, like her committees, and occasional tea-parties where I should meet people just like her. Since mother handed everything over to me, I'd ordered so many meals ; and I'd been to so many tea-parties ; it was rather dreadful to think I must simply go *on* doing that on a smaller scale, without father's big house and his prestige as Silversmith Professor. If I'd gone away to another part of England I should have had the excitement of making new friends and creating a circle for myself. Here I was so well known that, if I'd tried to be ambitious in any way, all these old women would have laughed at me. . . .

I thought of Joyce Armitage and the wonderful people she was meeting, the wonderful houses, that *spacious* life. . . .

"Marriage is too serious," I said, "to be undertaken in a hurry."

"Well," Mrs. Jacomb retorted, "if you don't marry Spenser Woodrow, you may be sure some one else will."

I hurried home to read what Spenser had been writing to me ; I wanted to see him and the radiance of love that came into his eyes whenever I looked his way at dinner. I wanted him to sit beside me and talk about himself because he felt he *must* share his whole life with me, though I wasn't particularly interested in friends of his whom I'd never met. Little by little I was allowing him to think that he was winning me over ; we talked more and more about the future and made plans about the things we should like to do and the places we wanted to visit. Switzerland. . . Spenser loved Switzerland almost as much as he loved me and, as I'd never been there, he wanted me to see it for the first time with him ; and that would probably be the last time for some years, as he would have to give it up and work very hard . . . "if I marry," he said breathlessly. . . . We used to talk about his work and his prospects : he was still so young that, though father prophesied a brilliant career for him, it would be long before he was offered any big position in England. Perhaps one of the

American universities would find an opening for him ; or, of course, if he'd given up history and joined the staff of a paper, as he was invited to do, he would have had a good position and a good income at once. I blamed him for throwing away the opportunity, though it was done before I knew him ; but he was so much absorbed in his work that he couldn't contemplate giving it up.

I allowed him no opportunity of proposing as long as I could put off thinking about the future and as long as I could enjoy my sense of power and my thrill at being wanted. I could tease him till he was on the verge of saying good-bye and dashing off in a rage, but I could always bring him back ; and, if I liked to prove my strength by hurting him, I liked still more to prove it by comforting him afterwards, so that he frowned or smiled at my bidding. For the first time my mere word, the tone of my voice could send a man hurtling from one extreme to the other ; and you may judge that my cruelty was only skin-deep from the fact that, when I heard he wasn't sleeping properly, I was always so sweet in the evening that he went to bed happy. I could tell you at once from any of his letters whether it was written at night or in the afternoon : the night letters were full of love, tenderness, hope, gratitude ; the afternoon letters were a little petulant. And in my turn I had to be careful that he shouldn't think he could bully me into sweetness by being ill-tempered ; and I couldn't let him presume on my sweetness to drive me faster than I wanted to go. I wanted the last ounce of enjoyment before I gave in to him ; and the days were *flying* ! One night he said :

"To-morrow's my last day. I wish I wasn't going, and yet perhaps it's just as well."

"How shall we spend it ? " I asked him.

"Let's go for a walk somewhere," Spenser suggested. "by ourselves."

He proposed to me in the middle of our walk.

It wasn't quite what I'd expected—I don't think proposals ever are : and I'd left him so uncertain of himself that, instead of making love to me, he talked like the chairman of a committee putting forward a compromise that would

overcome the scruples of all the members. I can see him *now*, leaning over a gate at Godstow, one foot on the bottom rail . . . oh, and being *reasonable*! Of all uncomfortable, unromantic times and places for a proposal! A dull, cold January day, the fields sodden with water, two inches of mud on the road beyond the gate, a melancholy audience of hens and geese, with one or two yokels lumbering home or carrying tin cans to the public-house. Perhaps even Spenser felt that the setting wasn't very attractive; almost the first thing he said was that he didn't ask for an answer then and there.

"I want you to go on thinking it over while I'm away," he explained; "and perhaps, when I come back at the beginning of term, you'll be able to put me out of my misery. I'm asking you to give up a tremendous lot, and, of course, we can't marry until I see what the college will do for me when my research fellowship runs out." . . .

Oh, I can't tell you what he said. There was something about waiting for two years, but I was so sick with disappointment that I hardly listened. I told you that, on the night after the ball, I'd made up my mind to marry Spenser; if I played with him, it was because I wanted him to see how much he needed me; and I wanted to remain aloof until I could bear it no longer: he should woo me, I said, as man had never wooed woman before, and I would yield as woman had never before yielded to man. If he knew how hungry I'd been for him all that week!

"Will you tell me—when I come back?" he was saying.

I've always wondered what would have happened if he'd proposed when we *weren't* standing in two inches of water, with these back-bent yokels splashing along the road! If he'd touched me, taken me in his arms! I wanted to be held as he'd held me when we were dancing, I wanted to be kissed! Hadn't I been saving that up for myself through a week of self-denial? If he'd kissed me then, I'd have promised anything, anything; but this cold, businesslike compromise was such an anticlimax that, before the end, I saw only the absurdity of it—the place, the hesitations, the hackneyed phrases. I felt tired—and

. . . somehow . . . as though Spenser had cheated me. I was angry with him. . . .

"I'll tell you when you come back from Switzerland," I promised, as soon as I could bring myself to speak.

He helped me over the gate, and we walked in dead silence from Godstow till we struck the Woodstock Road. Dear God, if this was *love*! . . . I wondered whether *he* had the same dreadful pang of spiritual hunger, as though some great ecstasy had been dangled before our eyes and then ruthlessly snatched away; if he hadn't, he couldn't want me, and, if he had, why didn't he take me in his arms? There was something unsatisfactory about Spenser. . . . He wouldn't kiss me; and now he couldn't even find anything to say to me. I wondered whether I really *was* in love with him, whether I wanted him always or whether I'd just been living in anticipation of this moment which was now denied me. Certainly I had so little looked beyond it that I'd never considered this question of waiting two years.

I wondered whether I could. . . . Another two years at Hillcrest as a new kind of Oxford tradition, the girl who had been engaged time out of mind to Spenser Woodrow . . . with all the Mrs. Jacombs wondering if I was *ever* going to get married. . . . In two years we should be stale. And, when we *did* marry—I remembered Mrs. Jacomb's poky little rooms—we should still be rooted to the same place.

I knew it so mercilessly well! We'd left the country behind and were passing between the first scattered villas; then came civilization, with lamp-posts, an unbroken line of houses, little semi-circular drives and clumps of trees, so smug and uniform! You could see the tables being laid for tea and the blinds being drawn. We struck across to the Banbury Road and found the same thing there, with civilization reinforced by trams. And then the familiar gate, the familiar rock-garden, the familiar oak door. . . . I know now that it was fancifulness and that Oxford had got on my nerves, but I *did* wonder whether I could consent to live in a place I hated so much. Consent? *That* was a *ridiculous* thing to say; Spenser had been asking whether I cared enough for him to wait two years; but, if I didn't wait, I should still be tied to Hillcrest.

It was that or hunting in London with Joyce Armitage or earning my living in a school. Of course I should marry Spenser, but I doubted if I could wait two years; in fact, it was because I wanted him so badly that I was unhappy now. If he'd only kissed me when I was ready and yearning for it!

In honour of his last night, father stayed with us in the drawing-room instead of going off to work—which wasn't at all the sort of attention that poor Spenser relished! We both wanted our little moment together; but, when mother and then Joan and then Grace all went up, it began to look as if father would outstay every one. So characteristic of him! A night's holiday was so rare that he thoroughly enjoyed talking to us! At last I had to take matters into my own hands; when eleven o'clock struck, I said I must be going to bed and asked father what he'd done with a book I'd lent him. If he offered to fetch it, I should be left alone with Spenser; if he told me where it was, Spenser could follow me.

"It's on my table in the library," said father; and, almost before he'd said it, Spenser was murmuring that he'd left his pipe upstairs.

We met in the hall. . . .

"I had to say good-bye to you alone," Spenser whispered.

"I wanted you to! Good-bye and God bless you!" I said.

"I'll give you my address. If you *can* possibly write. . ." He broke off in bewilderment. "I'd always thought it must be fun to be in love. It's—it's simply *hell* to be in this suspense!"

Isn't it curious how maternal love mingles with everything else in a woman? I'd determined to say that I dreaded long engagements and would only marry him if we married at once. Now I forgot all my calculations, all the preparations for my great scene; I only remembered that a poor, tired boy was standing before me overwrought and almost hysterical, looking reproachfully at me with a dog's faithful, troubled eyes. His eyes *hurt* me; and I knew that I alone had made him miserable. . . . I knew

also that I couldn't trust myself to soften for an instant ; yet I opened my arms to him—just to comfort him and set him smiling again.

In a moment he was gripping me as though he'd never let me go, raining kisses down on my lips, my cheeks, my forehead, my hair. I seemed to melt away and drown in a great gentle wave of bliss ; I thought I was dying, I *wanted* to die, I didn't struggle. . . And then I found I'd fallen away from him and he was holding me up with one arm under mine ; we were panting . . . and trembling ; I heard a roaring in my ears and wondered why the drawing-room door didn't open, for father must have heard it too. And then I broke away and stumbled upstairs, flapping my hand at him so that he shouldn't follow. If he *had* . . . I locked my door, to keep myself *in*, not to keep him *out*. Oh, if he'd come to me and said : " Now, *now* ! What does it matter if we starve ? " I should have gone. I wonder what would have happened if I had. . . .

When I turned to look down he was standing in the middle of the hall with the light beating on to his face and his arms outstretched to me ; his cheeks were very white, his eyes black and shining ; and I *had* brought back his smile ! Yet in some way it was a different smile, he was a different man—triumphant . . . as cruelly triumphant as I had been . . . almost as though he were saying to himself : " Well, you had to submit to her caprices ; she made you ridiculous, and you were fool enough to take it to heart. But it's all right *now* ; you've *got* her ; your heel's on her neck. You've learnt something about women that you'll never forget ; they're every bit as passionate as men, but they have to pretend they're being hunted against their will ; she wanted to be kissed as much as you wanted to kiss her. She's lost the advantage, you can turn her weapons against her. It was worth waiting to learn that. And now you can go back and have a drink with her father ; and then you can have your first good night for a week ; and to-morrow you can go to Switzerland with the knowledge that you've conquered."

I didn't come down next day to see him off. I couldn't have stood there in front of mother and father and Grace

and Joan and you, murmuring: "Well, *good*-bye, Mr. Woodrow; I *do* hope you'll have a good time. *Mind* you don't kill yourself climbing." . . .

I lay in bed till I heard the cab drive away, writing to him—my first love-letter. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

I

My first love-letter : eight, twelve, sixteen, *twenty* words !

" You tell me the suspense is hell, my dear one ; but you surely can't think I want you to suffer." . .

And then I stopped. My first love-letter ? My *only* love-letter. . . If I'd gone on, I must have said " no," which was absurd while I was on fire for him ; or " yes." . . . And that meant, not marriage but an engagement . . . for two years . . . two years of misery and yearning, two years of seeing him and kissing him, two years of the hell—I thank thee, Spenser, for teaching me that word !—that I was going through at that moment. Hunger—mad, blind hunger . . . From the moment when he kissed me, I was prepared to marry on nothing a year, to live in rooms in a back street, to be patronized by Mrs. Jacomb, to take anything that any one offered us in Birmingham, Cardiff, Polehampton ; but I couldn't wait two years. We must arrange something. . . . When Spenser came back, I'd tell him that I would only marry him if he didn't want me to wait ; and, in the meantime, I couldn't write for fear of softening towards him.

That morning reminded me of the times at King's Norton when one of the mistresses went out of the room. Such a flood of chatter was unloosed ! Mother seemed to throw off all her aches and pains ; Grace assumed an air of " Well, we've done our best for you ; did you bring it off ? " ; and Joan mooned about with a sleepy smile as much as to say : " Even I was enough awake to see what was going on." Vulgar, inquisitive *beasts* ! Father, of course, had too much breeding to join in ; but even he said

"Well, I shall miss Woodrow ; a thoroughly nice young fellow. . ." Just to shew his own hand in case I wanted to confide in him.

I wasn't in a position to confide in any one as yet. You see, if I'd said : "Spenser wants to marry me ; is it practicable ?" father might have said : "Oh yes, I'll find the money" ; or he might have said : "You'll have to wait a little" ; and that I couldn't stand. Rather than make a present of him to Spenser as an ally, I preferred not to consult him ; it would have been intolerable if I'd had to fight the two of them in order to get married before my husband wanted me. I'm sure that appeals to your sense of maiden delicacy, Ada ! No, I just bludgeoned mother and snubbed the other two ; and then I took myself in hand so that I should be equal to dealing with Spenser on his return. In spite of the bludgeoning they continued to be facetious at intervals until other people came to stay with us and so put a stop to it.

Put a stop to it and substituted something worse ! I'd invited Winnie Orm and the Burnleys for a week-end ; and I suppose, in my mood of those days, they were quite the worst people for me to meet. Winnie was just engaged to a throat-specialist in Harley Street, and Mildred had by now been married to Fritz Burnley for about two years ; it was the first time we'd all three been together for more than a few minutes since leaving King's Norton, and you may guess that we talked sex and marriage morning, noon and night. I was bewildered and, frankly, shocked. Mother belonged to a generation which believed that girls should be left to learn about life by divine revelation or the light of nature ; and, though I was eaten up with curiosity, I thought it was indecent to gratify it by whispering and speculating with Grace and Joan, who, I imagined, knew even less than I did. Well, Winnie Orm was a revelation to me : she seemed to think that the fact of being engaged gave her the right not only to know everything but to discuss it unblushingly. And Mildred Burnley was only too ready to oblige her. We used to sit in Mildred's room while she was brushing her hair and talk in a way that would have staggered father or Fritz Burnley

or Spenser or the man Winnie was engaged to, if they'd heard us. And, whenever we'd broken a new record, Winnie used to say:

"It's no use being mealy-mouthed."

And Mildred would agree:

"One has to be broad-minded."

And sometimes they felt that they must be careful before a *jeune fille*; and that made me wild to tell them that I was as good as engaged . . . and, of course, entitled to hear everything that Mildred chose to tell us. I wasn't shocked for long, but that week-end left me extraordinarily unsettled. I felt it was absurd for Spenser to talk about waiting two years. I wouldn't do it!

And if he said anything else was impossible? I began to rehearse our meeting. . . "Yes, I'll marry you and end this suspense at once. *Not* at once? Oh, I'm sorry for pressing on you something that you don't want. You *do* want it? Then why wait two years? To see whether I wear well, or if you meet somebody you like better?" All banter, of course, but the razor-edge banter of a woman who's been roused for the first time and is like a wild beast with death between her lips. People make light of lovers'-quarrels—*other* people's lovers'-quarrels—but they're the bursting of two souls under a too great charge of high-explosive. . . .

I had to brace myself for a quarrel, because it was no longer the simple question how soon we could afford to marry; we had to leave Oxford. I felt that when you all were baiting me; I felt it when I remembered Joyce Armitage's cold-blooded campaign of success; I felt it when Winnie Orm told me the wonderful life she intended to live; and I felt it when I realized that the Burnleys were enduring just what I refused to endure, with Hammer-smith in place of Oxford and struggling barristers in place of struggling dons. Spenser *must* find work in London, but I couldn't propose it; I should have seemed so terribly selfish if I'd made him give up his beloved history for me; but I could *make* him go, make him propose it himself, when he saw that was the only means of winning me.

And if he was still obstinate, if I turned to water again

as on the night when he kissed me. . . Well, you'll be shocked, but how much more shocked you'd have been twenty years ago in the last months of good Queen Victoria's reign : I was ready to become his mistress. Yes. . . . You see, it wasn't an unselfish *love* that I felt ; if he'd become infatuated with any one—this girl who always went with his party to Switzerland—and if I'd resigned all claims because I thought he'd be happier with her, *that* would have been love. If I'd been willing to wait two years for the joy of his companionship ever afterwards, that would have been love ; but I was dreading a lifetime, even with him, in the setting he had chosen. My feelings were simple and in no way discreditable : I regarded him a little bit as my child, because he was such an absurd boy, and women are always older than men of the same age ; but the rest was frank passion—clean and free and *natural*, my dear Ada, as the passion for air, or food, or drink. . . . That lesson I learnt from Mildred Burnley and Winifred Orm.

I told you I never left anything to chance ; that has been the secret of what people would call my success. I worked out to the last detail how far it was possible to live that life in Oxford, what risk of discovery we ran, how long it would continue . . . and what would happen afterwards. Almost certainly he wouldn't want to marry me *then* ; and of course he'd be secretly repelled when I proposed such a thing—or, rather, when I let *him* propose it, for the initiative would all be on his side. And it wouldn't be easy to tempt my Sir Galahad to *that*. On the other hand, I probably shouldn't want to marry *him*, though I was prepared to be the wife of an Oxford history tutor in order to secure him. You see, I had shifted my standpoint somewhat by now. I shifted it more whenever I allowed myself to think of the price ; when I went to the theatre and imagined the excitement next term over the O.U.D.S., when I walked along the tow-path and saw my own ghost shivering on a barge year after year and watching Torpids, when I read little Jacomb's "Oxford Letter" to *The Standard* and found him gravely prophesying gladiatorial struggles at the Union between Brown of

Trinity and Green of Balliol. The futility of it all maddened me, though I said I was foolish and that, whatever I felt, I'd endure it for Spenser's sake ; but it was instinctive. . . .

I don't know. . . . Perhaps it was all for the best that I saw it or felt it then ; felt it so strongly that I tore up those pitiful first two lines of my only love-letter for fear of weakening in my resolution to get Spenser on my own terms. The agony of those days and nights when I paced the streets of Oxford like a caged beast, timing my spring for the moment when he dared withstand me ! Every one at Hillcrest imagined that Spenser had sheered off without proposing : father was troubled . . . and wonderfully sweet ; the others, after two days' baiting, left me alone and said nothing when I disappeared at all hours for long solitary tramps to Cumnor, Headington, Woodstock. Agony ! But, at the end, it was something to have cleared my mind ; and I felt that, when we met, I should have the best of it.

As soon as he reached Switzerland, Spenser wrote twice a day (and there'd been one loving letter from London and another, written in the train, from Paris). It was glorious to hear from him and to feel his need for me ; glorious . . . and yet I hated it, because the letters unsettled me and made me want him just when I ought to have been keeping myself dispassionate. He was beginning to take me for granted, too. Well, after the way I'd betrayed myself and sacrificed my advantage, hadn't he the right ? He still talked a little about my "answer" ; but this was a formality, relegated to a postscript. The rest of the letter was powder and jam for the days after he'd had his answer : the powder a long lament about the time "we" should have to wait, the jam a series of wonderful plans. He had his eye on a house in Holywell, which "we" might be able to take on a long lease and then sublet till it was wanted ; there were various bits of furniture that he'd privately marked down in various out-of-the-way shops. "Spenser, my dear," I said, "you're taking my life for granted, too."

Probably this was deliberate. Unless he was a blind fool, he must have seen how I loathed Oxford ; and, as he had to live there, I daresay he wanted to accustom me to

the idea as soon as possible. Men always prefer to have bad news broken all at once; they like to see the extent of their liabilities; women like it broken more diplomatically, by degrees: I felt that Spenser ought to have made sure he'd won me before he so coolly disposed of my life. And then I clenched my fists and told myself that he *had* won me, because I'd given myself away. . . .

As though I wasn't overwrought and discontented enough already, I used to lash myself into an artificial frenzy by walking about and whispering to myself, "I *hate* this place. I hate the streets and the houses. The trams. The people. I *couldn't* live here all my life. I shall die if I live here"—I was going to say "another hour," but that would have been ridiculous, so I substituted "much longer."

"I hate everything about it!" I said. . . .

2

I was in that mood of suppressed irritation in which a girl is ready to do anything, provided it's sufficiently desperate, sufficiently foolish. It is a madness of youth and second youth, of blooming and second blooming: when a girl for no earthly reason—*apparently*—throws over the man she loves and breaks her heart in the process, when a woman runs away with a man she doesn't in the least care for, when all the friends wring their hands and say: "Why did she do it?" the answer is: "Because she was mad. She didn't want to do it, she didn't want *not* to do it; she didn't know what she wanted." If Spenser had dashed home to say that he'd been left a fortune and we could be married at once and live anywhere I liked, I believe I should have picked a quarrel and driven him out of the house.

I did want him so! And I did want to write Above all, I wanted a decision of some kind! Within a week North Oxford was convinced that I'd had a "disappointment," and, when I met Mrs. Jacomb in the street, she first looked uncomfortable and then asked me very briskly

whether I was going away at all that winter. Inane! As if any one ever went away from Hillcrest! . . . After that . . . I was like one rabbit against an army of ferrets: I scurried farther and farther away to find some place where no one would spy on me or ask me questions. Heaven knows where I used to walk!

One night I found myself beyond Summertown; and I can't tell you if I was going out or coming back. I'd drifted across the road, I remember, to look at a derelict car, when I suddenly saw a pair of legs protruding from under it. I was beginning to wonder if the man was dead or alive, when he crawled out, covered with oil, and began to abuse the car with perfectly ungovernable fury. I don't greatly care for swearing, especially among the pseudo-smart young women of the present day, but I suppose it must be a tremendous relief; all that I'd been bottling up inside me for days this man got rid of in two minutes. It was splendid to hear him! My spirits rose, my mood chimed with his so harmoniously that I laughed with sheer delight. He spun round as though he'd been shot; and I said, in spite of myself:

"Don't you feel much better now?"

I don't think I've ever seen a man look quite so foolish!

"Oh, by Jove!" he exclaimed, "I didn't know there was anybody near! Please forgive me, I only swear under strong provocation, but God knows I've had it with this infernal machine. . . . What you must think of me!"

In taking off his cap he had smeared one cheek with oil; and this, when he discovered it, provoked a new outbreak which he tried to conduct out of my hearing.

"I think it's so human," I said. "When you've got it over, tell me what's happened and let's see if I can be of any use."

He looked at me suspiciously to see if I was laughing. I was; and that made him laugh too, so that in a minute we both felt quite friendly and he began to tell me his chapter of accidents: a new car—and that was in the early days of motors—; he was driving himself up from Shropshire, where he'd been addressing a meeting of his constituents; the car had suddenly and mysteriously refused to move.

"And I've had nothing to eat since breakfast," he added piteously.

Just to meet him like that was rather an adventure ; and I was in the mood to stretch out both hands for anything that would give me excitement, distraction. I determined that, if I could contrive it, the adventure shouldn't end there.

"What are you going to do now ? " I asked.

"Leave the car to rot here, I suppose, and go up by train. I've a committee at eleven to-morrow. You don't happen to know the London trains, I suppose, or the time ? "

I told him we could lend him a time-table if he'd walk as far as Hillcrest. He turned out his lamps, took a rug and a suit-case out of the car and strode along beside me. On the way he introduced himself as George Creal—in the intervals of abusing the maker of the car and asking me about hotels.

"My name is Tenby," I said.

He bowed and walked on for a moment ; then he stopped short and tried to see my face.

"You're no relation of John Tenby, are you ? " he asked.

"He's my father," I told him.

"Oh, by Jove, but what luck ! " he cried, dropping the suit-case and wringing my hand. "I knew he'd been shifted to Oxford and I always meant to come and look him up, but I've always been too busy. Old John Tenby ! He was my tutor at Clare. Is he at home now ? Shall I be able to see him ? "

"If he hasn't gone to bed. I don't know how late it is," I said.

"Well, but what luck ! " he cried again. "Now let me think ! Did we ever meet ? I went down in '86. I remember he *had* children that we used to take on the Backs at the beginning of the summer term."

"Then I was certainly one of them," I said.

"I wonder if I shall remember you," he murmured, with another attempt to see my face.

I laughed and said nothing. He was an adventure ; and I wanted to meet him in the spirit of true adven-

ture, flashing on him suddenly in the light of the hall. . . .

It was after eleven when we reached Hillcrest. Mother and the rest of you had gone to bed, but I took him in to father and explained how we'd come across each other. Father and he were like a pair of school-boys ; and, while they were shaking hands and laughing and telling each other how well they looked, not a day older, I took stock of my adventurer. He was tall and bony, not in the least good-looking, with loose limbs and strong, freckled hands ; his face, too, was freckled, and he had a sandy moustache and hair and china-blue eyes ; wholesome and mediocre, I decided. The name was in some way familiar to me, and, while he was washing, I looked him up in *Who's Who* to avoid mistakes : " Creal, Hon. George Dolman, eldest son of 4th Baron Brentwood, Born 1865. . . Unmarried. . . " He'd been at Rugby and Clare, then he'd been A.D.C. to his father in Australia, then he'd gone into the House and was an extra under secretary at the Colonial Office. . . . I slipped the book back and was hunting for trains, when father came in and said :

" Poor Creal's had nothing to eat since breakfast. See what you can find for him, Marion."

Of course, I'd *done* all that, but I wanted the suggestion to come from father. If our guest stayed to eat anything, I knew he'd miss the last train. And I was glad, because father wouldn't let him go to an hotel and I wanted to see more of him. Was it simply my yearning for any kind of distraction, or does *every* girl tell herself stories of going out of a cottage and giving bread and cheese to a tramp and finding that he's an earl or a millionaire on a walking tour ? Nine-tenths of the popular novels seem to be constructed on those lines. I don't think I was still romantic enough in those days to be taken in by the stories I told myself ; and George Creal, with his " Oh, by Jove, you know ! " before everything, would never have passed for the hero of a novel ; but I was in the mood for anything that would keep me from thinking of Spenser and Oxford, Oxford and Spenser. It must have been rather exciting for George Creal, too, finding a young girl standing silently

by the road-side and offering to lead him to his old tutor ; the road was deserted, there was only a shimmer of moonlight through the clouds ; and he couldn't take his eyes off me when once I'd let him see my face. And he *was* the eldest son of a peer who'd been governor of a colony and owned 80,000 acres. Oh yes ! I'd had time to look up Lord Brentwood : Grosvenor Street and Eldmore Castle, Fifeshire. Do you wonder if we both felt a certain electricity in the air ?

Before he began his supper, father helped him push the car into safety and I had a room made ready for him. Then he began to talk about all he'd been doing since he went down from Cambridge, jumping about from one continent to another and once or twice breaking off to say :

" But I want to hear about you, sir."

Then father shook his head and took his pipe out of his mouth and said :

" Nothing to tell, George. Four years at Polehampton as Director of Studies and Professor of English ; here ever since. Happy the nation that has no history."

I *wondered*. . . . Cambridge, Polehampton, Oxford—and nothing more. George Creal was making me restless and discontented. When father had mentioned the names of half a dozen old colleagues, who were now married or dead, that marked the boundary of his world. George didn't seem to have any boundaries : he was at home everywhere and knew everybody. . . .

In time they reached the House of Commons and began to discuss politics. Of course, all the people I'd read of in the papers were George's *friends*, he was *working* with them ; it was always, " I warned Chamberlain what would happen . . ." or " I tried to come to an understanding with Redmond, but it was no good," or " The Duchess of Ross gave a party on purpose ; she's sometimes very useful in smoothing over difficulties of that kind, when she doesn't over-reach herself. . ." This great world in which he moved so easily ! I wanted to play a part in it ; I felt I could play a successful part, because I'd read an enormous lot for my age : once or twice I corrected George on questions of

fact that I'd learnt when I was reading for the Politics and Modern History Diploma at Polehampton, and he soon dropped into the habit of referring to me when he was out of his depth.

I realized then for the first time, I think, that most of the people who talk politics, including members and ministers, haven't read or thought; with a little trouble I believed I could beat them at their own game. While I was having a day-dream about that, father began to talk about the other men of George's year at Cambridge and asked whether he'd seen anything of Martin Shelley. From that they got on to the big literary figures of the day, Kipling and Shaw and Yeats and Meredith and Hardy and James and Pinero and Barrie. George seemed to know them all; he worshipped books, he said, and could spend all his life reading. I liked him for that, and my day-dream grew. Then I found that he only cared for the fashionable books of the moment; and English books at that; he knew nothing of Russian, French, German, Italian. For some reason that made me extraordinarily angry; when George said of some fifth-rate book: "That had a great success; everybody in London was talking about it," he implied that what these ignorant parrots repeated from reviews really *mattered*. Father, of course, was too polite to say they didn't know what they were talking about; but I was less patient, I had been trained by him to a sense of proportion and I wanted to bang their empty heads together.

Meanwhile I was condemned to Cambridge, Polehampton and Oxford. . . .

That thought suddenly flamed across my vision, complicated with all kinds of other thoughts about Spenser and our impending struggle; I had to let fly. And, of course, when once I began arguing with George about the things he pretended to know, he first of all stared and then tried to run away. . . .

Finally he laughed like a boy and said:

"I don't mind trying to bluff one professor, but I'm not equal to two." . . .

I let him off lightly. After all, I could see I'd made an impression and I wanted to go on with my day-dream. He had opened up—to perfection—a vista of the great world which I had always half-unconsciously wanted to enter and dominate. The fact that it was unattainable didn't make it any less attractive. I've always thought that Mrs. Humphry Ward's political novels are beneath contempt, but *Marcella* and her successors, if they were nothing else, were powerful to the extent of seducing the minds of otherwise quite harmless girls. In that generation, if you followed the parliamentary debates or did a little slumming or read a few pamphlets and biographies or met a minister at luncheon, you saw yourself as a political hostess; I won't pretend I hadn't had that dream; lying before the fire in father's room I had changed the course of history once every five minutes—and, what is more, I had the necessary knowledge to do it far more effectively than most of the women I afterwards met! But, even while I dreamed, I knew it was only a dream; ministers didn't come to Hillcrest, and I didn't go to the places where ministers could be found to hang on my lips. . . .

Until that night. . .

George had miraculously dropped from the clouds between two crises; he'd been expounding the policy of the government—at the request of the prime minister—in his constituency; it was a controversial speech, and he was going back to defend himself next day in the House. This was a breath from the inmost sanctuary! I *was* meeting statecraft at first hand! As soon as I'd made my effect with George, I let him go back to father while I fitted in my day-dream with the facts of George and the Colonial Office and the Wellington division of Shropshire. . . . I saw a house like Lady Dexter's, when Joyce Armitage took me there, filled with beautiful things instead of with the incongruous Cambridge and Polehampton refuse that you couldn't afford to change; in that house you would never have to ask if you could *afford* things, for civilized life only begins when you can cease troubling about money. Dresses

and jewellery I didn't care about except in so far as they were necessary to my setting ; it was the style and spaciousness that I needed. The hall, the staircase, the gallery. . .

And the *people* ! I thought of my dinners—with Mr. Chamberlain on one side of me and Sir Charles Dilke on the other ; the Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Londonderry at one remove ; a journalist or two—say, Labouchere ; a diplomat, Mr. Choate or his like ; an author. . . . I should draw them all out and keep the ball rolling until we had arrived at something, hammered out something new—an Irish policy ! And they would come to me afterwards, as they went then to the Duchess of Ross, who was never anything but a very active, very inept wire-puller with a big position ; they'd say : " This is all very well, but it's *your* policy ; do you think you can make Lord Lansdowne see our point ? " And I would arrange another party and win over Lord Lansdowne or whoever it might be. . . . As I did, for ten years and more ! It was on a smaller scale, I had to fight my way in by a back-door ; but I influenced *people* and brought them together ; from 1905 the Whips realized that I was a force to be reckoned with. If I'd started on a higher plane, I'd have rivalled Londonderry House. . . .

It wouldn't have been *all* politics ; that was chiefly professional, on George's account. . . . Yes ! Day-dreams are debilitating, but they don't become actively harmful until you cease to see that they're only dreams—as I was doing for the first time ! When I began to tell myself this story about George and me and the Grosvenor Street house and the castle in Fifeshire, he was only an idealized figure ; when I looked at him, he wasn't by any means the figure of my ideal, but he was a *living* figure ; and of course, when I followed my dream into reality, he was a passable figure. I forgot everything except this life that I was planning for the two of us : our political parties, and the parties that we gave as a rest from politics. I intended that all the great world should come to me. Music. . . . You would have seen Mr. Balfour leaning back in a corner—his corner ; and Lady de Grey. . . . And every Tuesday, say, there would be a general gathering. No invitations : every one would

know it was Marion Brentwood's evening, and they would all come. And I should rule them. . . .

When I wasn't entertaining, I should be going to all the other parties ; and people would rush up and beg me to arrange a meeting with some new star who had lately swum into our ken. Naturally. I was the one person who knew them all. I knew them before any one else ; *I* decided who was worth knowing. . . . As I *did*, as I *did*, Ada, for more than ten years, at least with the literary people ; if I decided to *make* a man . . . Henry Bryant, Clara Denman, young Baxall ; I could give you a *list*

Like the thunder of voices when you're coming to after an anæsthetic, I heard George telling father that he must really go to bed if he had to make an early start next day.

"Well," said father, "you've no excuse for not looking us up now. We lie right across your route from London to your constituency. The next time you think of preaching the word to them——"

"I shan't wait for that," George interrupted. "If you really mean it, I'll invite myself up one week-end during the next recess." Then he turned to me. "*You*, Miss Tenby, will hear from me within two days. I'm morally certain you were wrong over the sliding-scale amendment ; such a thing was never proposed. And on that I'll wager a dozen pairs of the best white-kid gloves against one hundred cigarettes."

"I take six-and-a-quarters," I said.

That night I tried *hard* to keep from thinking. If I'd really had a great success with George, it would have solved so many difficulties. If I wasn't in love with him, I was in love with his life ; if I was in love with Spenser, I now loathed his life till I was almost prepared to fight down my love. If only I could have taken Spenser for a time and then gone to George when we'd had our honeymoon !

I didn't lie in bed *next* morning till I'd heard the cab drive away ! When George came down, there was a blazing fire in the dining-room and I was waiting to give him a breakfast that I'd supervised personally. I asked him to excuse mother, who was rather delicate ; I talked a little

about "my sisters"; and I encouraged him to say what a glorious man father was (you can always make a good impression on men by displaying extravagant loyalty to your family; they think you're an untapped reservoir of natural affection—or, in other words, that they'll have an easy time with you). I *fancied* that George was rather embarrassed at being alone with me and allowing me to wait on him; before he left, I thought I'd give him some encouragement. As he got into the cab, I said:

"Good-bye! I hope you won't be late for your committee. And I hope you meant what you said last night about coming to see us again some time. We live such a retired life that it's more than pleasant when any one comes to us from the world of affairs."

"I shall certainly come," said George. "I arranged a week-end with your father last night." Then he became rather pink. "Please forget the exhibition I made of myself in the road."

"You should apologize to the car," I suggested.

"I'm grateful to the car," said George.

"The ass was wiser than Balaam," I told him.

When father came down to breakfast, he said:

"Well, my dear, did you feel your ears burning last night? Creal kept me up half an hour after you'd gone to bed, telling me what a remarkable girl you were."

Poor darling, he was so happy that I'd shewn the least sparkle of animation! By now he'd evidently made up his mind that everything was over between Spenser and me; when I shewed an interest in another man and he shewed an interest in me, dear father was as pleased as if he'd fallen in love himself. As I kissed him and tried to straighten his hair, which was untidy even at breakfast, he gave me a little hug. . . . If my ears weren't burning before, my cheeks were now; and I wished father hadn't talked like that in front of mother and the rest of you, especially as he added that George had actually fixed his time for coming. Only too well I knew mother's tragic love of stage-managing! And some streak of decent feeling made me wish that he hadn't given my will that little push along the line it was already trying so hard to follow!

The odds had been so much in Spenser's favour that it did seem cruel to wipe out his advantage in his absence, when he'd done nothing to deserve it! I hadn't abated a particle of my love for him, but within the last twelve hours my love for him wasn't so important by comparison with other things. . . . The second post that day brought the usual letter, and for the first time I was afraid to open it; half the time when we think we're making up our minds they're making themselves up for us, and by now I'd decided against Spenser sufficiently to feel that I wanted to start afresh with him, unbiased, to consider him in relation to everything else, not in the light of our old love. I mustn't be weak! And his letter *would* weaken me; it would make me go on wanting him when I was telling myself that, if need be, I *could* get on without him. I . . . put it in a drawer and went for a longer walk than usual, trying to argue it all out. . . .

Next day I received twelve pairs of gloves from George and an apology for his having presumed to doubt my infallibility. "*You have given me furiously to think,*" he added. "*What right have I to a place on the front bench while you waste your learning on the desert air of Oxford?*"

It may not have meant anything, but I thought it *did*. And I spent an hour before I was satisfied with my answer: two allusions, a quotation and an epigram, in four lines. I *know* now that he was half serious; I knew it when he quite unnecessarily thanked me for my letter of thanks . . . and wrote again to cap my quotation. We corresponded—very wittily and very learnedly—until he came to stay with us. . . . And, whatever it was intended to convey to me, I know now that it conveyed a sentence of death to poor Spenser. He wired one morning from Paris to say that he was crossing that day and that the whole party would spend the night at the Charing Cross Hotel—the friend from Cambridge and Mrs. Sefton and her daughter and the other man. I wrote and asked him to meet me somewhere in Oxford and come for a walk, so that we could discuss things at leisure.

He wired back:

"*Top of Headington Hill three o'clock.*"

I went by Mesopotamia, he came by road ; and I found him waiting for me under a tree at the top of the hill. When you're first in love with somebody and haven't seen him for some time, you can hardly believe that he'll still be just what you thought he was, just what you remembered; as I went towards Spenser, I had a thirty yards' view, and he was all I'd imagined—more ! Switzerland had given him a brighter colour, and his eyes were even more marvelously clear than usual ; but the youth, the clean outline, the sharp-cut features, the straight back and strong limbs were things that didn't change. I couldn't breathe ! I gave a little sob and whispered : " Oh, my dear, my dear. . ." Then I pulled myself together.

The first thing I noticed was that Spenser was in a very bad temper. It might have been anxiety, he might be angry that I'd kept him waiting ; but, when I said : " I *am* glad to see you again," he found it hard even to be gracious.

" I've been looking forward to this—almost unbearably," he muttered ; and then : " I think you might have written, Marion."

" It was too difficult," I sighed.

" But if you had to make up your mind by a given day. . . Every hour that you cut short the waiting would have been such a present as you'll never be able to make again. However, I'm so glad to see you that we needn't bother about what's past. . . . Well, Marion ? "

Just that one word . . . " *Well ?* " . . . If only he'd continued in the humble strain, anything might have happened ; but the little frown of ill-temper and the " *Well ?* " which meant to me " Have you had enough ? You *must* give in, you know, in the end "—that seemed to rasp every nerve in my body.

I said :

" Well, Spenser ? " Then I added : " Tell me what you want me to say, my dear."

" I want you to say you'll marry me."

" I know ! If that had been all, I might have answered

without making you wait ; but . . . is it possible ? Can we afford to marry ? That's what I've been wondering. . . . And where are we going to live ? And how ? Dear Spenser, instead of blaming me for not writing, you should be sorry that I've been worried out of my mind : I want what you want—there !—but I know that before I say a word to father I shall have to present a workable scheme. We must be very patient and very wise."

Spenser nodded and didn't seem to know what to say next. I took his arm and led him back towards Mesopotamia. At last he blurted out, with an air of great frankness :

" Well, of course, I can't make out much of a case on paper. I hoped that, if we went to the professor and told him that we were in love and wanted to be engaged—— "

" He'd insist on looking ahead," I interrupted. " Fathers are like that, you know. . . . Spenser, it's hateful to talk about money, but, *if* we became engaged, how soon d'you think we could be married ? "

" All being well, in two years' time," he answered.

" I think that father—I haven't spoken to him, of course ; it seemed premature—I think that father would insist on our waiting until it was a little nearer the time."

That seemed to bring Spenser's ill-temper to the surface, and he fought it down with a big effort.

" I shouldn't like to go against your father's wishes, of course," he said, with an impatient, nervous laugh, " but don't you feel this is primarily *our* affair ? Marriage would be a different thing altogether, but if you and I choose to say we're engaged or to *consider* ourselves engaged without telling any one—— "

" I've thought of that," I said. " But—is it what I want ? "

That startled him. . . .

" I assumed—perhaps rashly—," said Spenser very stiffly, " that you cared for me."

" Of course I care for you ! Should I have let you kiss me if I didn't ? . . . But I've a horror of long engagements. It would be a terrible strain for both of us, we should probably quarrel and get on each other's nerves ;

if it were a secret engagement, everybody would gossip about us when we were seen together, and, if we made it public, everything would seem utterly flat when we were married after waiting so long. That's what's been worrying me for the last fortnight."

"What d'you suggest, then?" asked Spenser.

It was just what I *didn't* want him to say! I didn't *want* to take the initiative. . . .

"Well," I said, "we haven't pretended that we *don't* love each other. I should have thought that meant a great deal to you—my love, the knowledge that you have it; you can't talk about *suspense* any more. . . . Why not go on, just as we are, until the day when we can go to father and tell him everything? You can be with me as much as you like until you've found some appointment which will make it possible for us to marry." . . .

That was my nearest approach to telling him that he must come to London with me, my nearest approach to offering myself to him. . . .

"And we can quarrel and get on each other's nerves," he cut in. "How is your proposal different from mine except in the one point that I want the comfort of knowing we're *engaged*? Are you afraid that one of us may change?"

"How does a secret engagement—father wouldn't hear of anything else—," I said, "how does a secret engagement differ from what I'm proposing?"

Try as I might, I couldn't see what he was aiming at.

"I should feel sure of you," Spenser burst out; "and I don't now. I went through one hell when I didn't know whether you cared for me; and I've exchanged it for another since I began to wonder how *long* you'd care for me." Evidently he felt he'd said too much and tried to turn it off with a laugh. "It's only natural for men to fall in love with you: if I couldn't stand out against you, it will be the same with others."

"You ought to be pleased," I suggested, "to find your judgement so well backed."

"I suppose I'm jealous."

"Can't you keep your jealousy in check until you find me falling in love with another man?"

Spenser frowned and said nothing. Now, he certainly wasn't getting things all his own way, and, when a man's worked up to great excitement, that's enough to make him sulky and difficult; but he'd been sulky from the beginning. Why? Quite clearly he was jealous, but the only man I'd *spoken* to since he went away was George Creal, and I felt it was impossible that he'd had time to hear of that. . . .

"You're free to do what you like at present," he complained. "If we were engaged, I should feel as sure of you as if we were married."

"You want to begin neglecting me from to-day," I laughed.

"I should be too much afraid of your breaking off the engagement!"

"Then," I said, "you wouldn't have much certainty. Isn't that really the answer to everything? If we're quite sure that we shall always love each other, it'll be all the same in two years' time; if we're going to find that we're not very well suited, it's a thousand times better not to have all the pain of breaking off an engagement. Why, in two years you may meet some one you prefer to me!"

"I don't think that's altogether likely," said Spenser with terrible earnestness.

"There's your friend Miss Sefton," I suggested—out of pure mischief.

"Good God, you're not jealous of *her*, Marion? She's an old friend and a very sweet girl, but that's all. I've known her and her mother——"

"You protest too much!" I laughed. "I daresay she isn't a rival, but she's the only girl you've ever mentioned to me. There may be others, of course; you may be using her as a stalking-horse." . . .

I only wanted to tease him, to make him tell me again that he loved me more than any one in the world, to shake him out of his heroics and to gain a little time. Instead, I made him even more intense. . . .

"Since I met you, I've not *looked* at another woman," he cried. "Merciful Heavens, what d'you take me for? Would you look at another *man*?"

It wasn't a rhetorical question; it was a trap. I've

never had any proof, but I know, I *know* some one must have been talking to him. He'd had only half a day in Oxford, but during that time Mrs. Jacomb or Mrs. Chesterfield or one of the others had told him about George Creal, quoting mother, in all probability. "Quite a romance! His car broke down, and Marion found him wrestling with it. She brought him home for some supper, and instantly he fell such a victim that he invited himself to come and stay. . . ." Mother *wouldn't* leave these things alone; and I knew now why Spenser was so sulky.

"In two years you may fall in love with some one else," I said. "I want to give you a fair chance. I shouldn't want to keep you then; and, if I met some one who would make me happier than you could ever hope to do, surely you wouldn't want to keep me?"

"Yes, I should!" he burst out.

"Then you don't love me enough to care whether my marriage brings me happiness?" I asked. "You just want to stake out a claim on me and then go back to your work. If you really loved me, you'd be ready to stand aside for another man."

That was the way I used to madden him in the week before he went to Switzerland. . . . Why does one talk like that to a man? I suppose it's love of power and some cruel desire to hurt what is most dear to you. I could always argue Spenser into a corner so that, if he said he couldn't give me up, I told him that his love was selfish and, if he said he *might* give me up, I told him he didn't really want me. Why *are* we such beasts of prey? I once thought it was because women have so little open initiative in love-making, they're supposed to say "yes" or "no"—and they're not content with that; but I know now that, if women habitually proposed to men, they'd be just as cruel, *more* cruel to any one who slighted them. No, the days before a woman yields are the time of her greatest power; and she seems to drink her fill then so that she may forget the helplessness and indignities of the past and the helplessness and humiliations of the future. . . .

"I want you more than anything in life!" said Spenser in a whisper that went through me like a red-hot needle.

"That's why we must be engaged at once. Then you wouldn't *allow* yourself to like any one better! You don't suppose I can live in the same city, seeing you and always having to keep at a distance, wanting to cut the throat of any man who speaks to you? It must be one thing or the other!"

That was as near as he came to shaking me. . . . I *was* shaken. He was feeling his way towards an ultimatum, and I wanted to avoid it; while he stood there, I felt there *must* be some way of getting him as I wanted him; I *couldn't* give up being loved by him. . . .

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean," I said. "That *sounded* rather like a *threat*."

"It was a plain statement of fact," he answered. "Flesh and blood couldn't stand what you're proposing. Sooner than that, yes, sooner than that I'd try to forget I'd ever met you. One thing or the other."

And then I knew that I mustn't answer and mustn't let him say any more. He was standing with his legs apart and his hands on his hips, looking down and *burning* me with the light in his eyes. There was all the ruthless severity of the Red Indian. If he'd caught me in his arms . . . But an ultimatum's more likely to rouse a woman's obstinacy than her love. If I'd said anything, I should have said: "Go; and see if you can get on as well without me as I can get on without you." . . .

"Don't say anything more," I begged. "You'd better think carefully before you do something that we may both regret."

And then I gave him my hand and walked home alone. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

I

"ONE thing or the other." . . .

When I reached home, I asked myself how we stood. Insomuch as nothing had been decided and we'd had no big scene, the meeting was not so bad as I'd feared; but it was worse in that the sight of Spenser had shaken me. Strange that he shouldn't have seen: one more turn of the rack, and I should have given in. If he'd touched me! But we were two cowards, threatening and blustering, but *afraid* to give battle. . . . And it was "one thing or the other" with me, too. I couldn't live in the same city with him, seeing him daily for two years and having to repress all my love for him. Flesh and blood wouldn't stand that, either.

I had to let him take the first step. What fools we are in wars and strikes and business deals—yes, and in love!—with all our manœuvring for position. There'd be some point in it if the other side didn't see everything you were doing and discount it beforehand! If I reopened communications with Spenser, it would mean that I was accepting his terms; if he came to me, it would mean either that he was trying to wear me down by obstinate repetition or else that he had some new terms to propose. He couldn't do either without weakening on his "one thing or the other" declaration; and, if he did nothing at all, it would mean that I refused to be engaged, that he accepted my refusal and that everything was over.

I didn't expect him that night, but I thought he might come next day. He didn't . . . nor the day after; and I settled down to a trial of strength. In some ways I

was glad to gain a little time, because George was coming to us at the end of a week, and I felt that the choice might be easier when I had the two alternatives thrown into contrast ; but in other ways it was unbearable, because George was beginning to write every day, he was drifting nearer and nearer, and, while I could keep him at bay by remaining on my intellectual eminence, I *did* get a little tug of conscience when I saw myself playing this double game. George, I felt, could take care of himself ; numberless women must have set their caps at him, and I should think he was quite equal to making love to two women at the same time ; but it was different with Spenser : he was so single-hearted, so terribly upright and rigid about " the right thing to do " ; he was incapable of flirting with the Sefton girl when he was in love with me and, if he ever knew what I was doing, he would rank me with the lowest prostitute from the gutter. It wasn't only in appearance that he was a Red Indian : on most subjects his idealism was so uncompromising that I was always afraid of being found out. . . .

For all his directness and rigidity, he condescended to be diplomatic with me ; it's hardly too much to say that he arrived at a compromise. He wouldn't come to see me, but on the following Sunday he called on mother ! Called on her and talked to her at me and across me : he *must* take the earliest opportunity of paying his respects and thanking her for all her kindness to him earlier in the vacation (" Good Heavens ! " I said to myself, " is it still less than a month since all this turmoil began ? "), he *must* tell her what a wonderful time he'd had in Switzerland. . . . Mother didn't know what to make of him : if he'd sheered off, it was rather funny that he should call at Hillcrest so soon ; and, though he wasn't effusive to me, I don't think she noticed any tension. As he made no particular effort to talk to me, I said good-bye at the end of tea and told mother that I'd promised to call on Mrs. Jacomb. Spenser *did* say then that he'd like to " accompany Miss Tenby," if he might.

" Miss Tenby." . . .

If he hadn't given me a cue, I shouldn't have known what

to say ; but, as we left the house and he called me " Marion," I had to ask him what our relations were supposed to be.

" I called you ' Miss Tenby,' " he explained, " because I didn't want to startle your mother."

" I understand," I said, " but where do I fit into this scheme ? I don't like mysteries and conspiracies."

" I'm still waiting to hear from you," he answered.

" A reply to your ultimatum ? I don't like being threatened, Spenser."

" And I don't like being played with," he retorted.

" This is much too serious for any playing. What *do* you want ? "

" I want you to be my wife."

There we had it, in its simplest form. . . .

" I know that, dear heart ! " I said. " I've known it from the moment when you first held me in your arms. Listen, Spenser : I've nothing to hide from you. I'd never been in love before you came into my life ; and I think we fell in love at the same moment. It was so new, so wonderful that I couldn't believe it was true ; when you said you were mad, I agreed with you and I felt that I was mad, too ; I waited to become sane, but I found this wasn't a thing one outgrew. . . . Then you asked me to marry you ; and the whole of a glorious new world rose like a comet, to redden and burst at my feet, leaving before me an enchanted land where I seemed to bow my head before the sun and kneel down among the flowers to thank God, to thank God, oh ! and to *pity* any one who wasn't in love. I'd have gone with you to the ends of the earth, recklessly, blindly. . . "

I was out of breath, I had to stop. . . . Spenser gripped my wrist and said :

" Don't you think you might have told me ! "

The brutal selfishness of people in love. . . .

" A girl doesn't say those things," I told him. " What she fears more than anything in the world is to offer something that may be thrown back on her. She can't help it ; it's stronger than she is ; and women who would cheerfully murder me would come to my protection if a man threatened my pride. I was ready to give everything,

but you didn't ask for it ; you wanted to stake out a claim on me . . . and come back to develop it when you felt inclined. You mustn't expect a woman to put herself up to auction. That's why I couldn't tell you or help you. And, when you *did* speak, I thanked God that I hadn't cheapened myself to you, that I hadn't said I'd go in that hour to the ends of the earth with you when you only wanted me to move across the street . . . in two years' time ! But, when you went away, I conjured up my vision again . . . to see how much you'd left of it. Shall I humble myself ? Even your caution hadn't chilled my love, Spenser : I believed that you still wanted me ; and night and day for two weeks I thought how we might live out our dream. I knew we should be poor, but, if you loved me, that didn't matter (I had a girl staying with me who'd married on *nothing* and cooked her own meals for the first year) ; I was ready to take the risk for a man I loved. When you came back, you asked me again to marry you ; I said 'How soon' ; and again it was 'two years.' No question of taking a risk for me, no consulting me : 'Two years, take it or leave it, one thing or the other.' . . . I really wondered whether you *did* care for me. I wasn't essential to you, if you could get on without me so comfortably ; you only wanted to be engaged because you liked the sense of possession and were jealous of other men. . . . That was three days ago. I've tried to make every allowance for you, I've looked soberly at the life you're proposing for us ; and I've found only the shattering of a dream and the tarnishing of an ideal. I ought to hold some wonder for you, but in two years I should be a habit ! The *mystery* of love, the glory, the splendid adventure that we should make of our life together . . . it would all have evaporated in two years ; literally, quite literally I should only be crossing the road from father's house to yours. And it's that or nothing : one thing or the other, you say. Well, my dear, I forbade you to utter a single word that you might afterwards regret ; but, if you want to say it, I can't prevent you. I *hope* you won't make me choose between these two ; I warn you that threats are wasted on me. If you want to marry me now——"

"I can't," he interrupted.

"Then don't let's discuss it till you can. You won't expect me to agree with you. To begin with, you could earn five times your present income in London——"

"But I can't leave my work!"

"If you were ready to come with me to the ends of the earth, you'd gladly leave everything. . . . But we won't have a vague engagement; you mustn't rob my romance of all its glamour. Perhaps, if you don't see very much of me, you'll find you want me so badly that you'll take a risk for my sake; perhaps you'll find that you can get on without me, and then it's best for us not to be tied in any way."

I felt strong enough to challenge him like that! Though I'd given myself away, I still had enough restraint and pride to keep me from going on my knees to him; it was Spenser who'd made first overtures that day, and I'd have wagered my life that he would yield to my terms. . . .

"Then it's 'one thing or the other' with you, too?" he asked after a long silence.

"Don't let's issue ultimatums!" I begged. "I've told you what I *can* do—and what I can't. Most women would feel they'd given something rather big when they'd said they would marry a man without a moment's delay; that is apparently too little for you—or too much. You said in Switzerland that it was torture to be without me; do you really want to say good-bye?"

"Do you?" asked Spenser; and in that moment I saw that he was resolved on another trial of strength. It was the tone in which he'd said "Well" three days before, when I felt he was thinking: "You'll have to give in sooner or later." Spenser was still very sure of himself, though he'd already come obediently to heel that day.

"You know I don't," I told him frankly. "But now I must say good-bye for the present. Here is Mrs. Jacomb's house. Good-bye, Spenser."

"Good-bye, Marion," he answered very deliberately. And then I left him.

Three days, I thought, would be sufficient for his demonstration, but there was no sign of him, no letter or message

on the fourth or fifth. I hadn't yet heard from him when George Creal came up for the week-end. . . .

2

My first romance, my one great passion. . . I couldn't *believe* it had come to an end. I waited for him to relent ; I *had* left the door open so that he could reestablish communications without loss of dignity, though it wasn't his dignity that was troubling him, it was sheer physical inability to stand the strain. I knew all about that ; I'd known it since the night he kissed me before going away. . . . Something that I just couldn't stand up to. . . .

Every day I thought he'd come round. . . . If you'd asked me what was going on in my mind, Ada, I couldn't have told you ; women don't analyse and set out these inexorable alternatives until afterwards ; I know *now* that I wanted, at all costs, to keep him in my life. . . . And I was certain, *certain* that he wasn't strong enough to let me go. If I'd known more, if this hadn't been my first love-affair, I could have held him : little flashes of hope, little spurrings of passion, indifference at one moment and a kiss the next, I could have kept him enslaved ; but it was *my* first love-affair, too. . . .

You might say that we certified the death on the day before George Creal came up for his week-end. Mrs. Jacomb and mother and the rest of North Oxford, after making up their minds that Spenser had eluded me, were bewildered when he came to call in the old way and I automatically went off with him ; I believe I gained a passing reputation for being very "deep"! When he disappeared after that one call, mother couldn't make it out at all ; and, as she'd now decided that I couldn't look after myself without her help, she had to find out whether the ground was clear before she spread her net for George : it would be too ridiculous if she encouraged him to fall in love with me when I was already in love with some one else ; and why should she waste George when he might come in so usefully for Grace ?

"When does Spenser Woodrow begin his work with you again?" mother asked father one day—across me.

"I met him in the street the other day," said father. "He was very busy straightening things up, but I expect he'll come along soon."

When he *didn't* come, mother wrote and invited him to dinner; when he wrote back that he was engaged, she tried again; and he was still engaged. Then she tackled me. I forget how she started, but I soon found her apostrophizing Spencer, talking *at* me and saying how curious, how really rather rude it was of him suddenly to drop us after we had shewn him quite a good deal of hospitality. I didn't betray myself, even when she attacked him. Then she asked whether I could suggest any reason; and then, quite openly, she said that he and I had seemed very good friends, *intimate* friends, and was anything the matter? I pretended that he was nothing more to me than any other friend of father's who came to the house, but mother at once cut in with:

"He was writing to you every day while he was in Switzerland, sometimes twice a day."

"I suppose he'd no one else to write to," I said.

But mother wasn't to be put off with that. She hadn't *said* anything, she told me, because I always charged her with interfering, but she'd *noticed* . . . And other people were noticing too. . . My dear, I know what younger sisters are! You were probably as bad as they were. At the Infirmary Ball hundreds of people had seen us, and I had all mother's past record in man-hunting to contend with: they were all saying, "Ah, Spenser Woodrow this time! I wonder if she'll have any success with him." . . . Before Spenser went to Switzerland, North Oxford had quite definitely married us off.

Mother told me all this—rather with an air of finding what I proposed to do about it. My *feelings*. . . I don't think they entered into her calculations; but North Oxford was waiting for the curtain to go up. If I'd refused him, if he'd grown tired of me, North Oxford—which was thoroughly bored and hard-up for conversation—had a right to know; and mother, though she didn't say so,

would have known how to play her cards with George. . . . But why hadn't I made sure of Spenser? And, if I wasn't going to marry him, why had I so grossly misled North Oxford?

It was all I could do to keep from screaming.

"My dear mother," I said, "Spenser and I are excellent friends, but you can be friends without wanting to marry. I don't suppose for one moment," I said, "that Spenser is in a position to marry yet; has he any private means? Why not believe him when he says that he's too busy to dine at present? *You* know how work accumulates before the beginning of term." . . .

Mother would only say that a man must be very busy if he had no time even to be civil to his friends and that, if nothing was coming of it, I had been foolish to let people talk so much.

"Mrs. Brander-Wilson . . ." she began.

Mrs. Brander-Wilson! I've not *thought* of that name for ten years. She was mother's Mrs. Harris, the epitome of North Oxford: a woman who gave herself over to religious mania in the morning and work-teas in the afternoon.

"If you ever quote Mrs. Brander-Wilson to me again," I said, "I shall walk out of this house and not come back." . . .

How I managed to live with mother as long as I did! . . . I can hardly remember the day when she didn't exasperate me. While we were children, she behaved like a sour old nurse (it may have been health even then): "You mustn't worry your father, Marion"; "It's not what you want but what your father and I think is best for you"; how I hated her phrases and mannerisms! I was too bitter to have much toleration; and I've never understood why I should be expected to bear with qualities in a relation when I wouldn't bear with them in any one else. So, when mother exasperated me beyond a certain point, I bludgeoned her; and then father, who was absolutely loyal, though I'm sure he sympathized with me, used to rebuke me with great dignity and insist that I should apologize. And, when I'd said I was sorry, I used

to go for a long walk . . . until I felt better . . . and hurry into the house without seeing it all, as it were, the winding path and the two little rock-gardens and the high oak door and the devastating *sameness* that I knew was waiting for me behind it. . . .

This time father didn't send for me ; but, when we met, I found him gentler and sweeter even than usual. I discovered afterwards that they'd had a long talk and had agreed that I was suffering from a terrible "disappointment." So I was—an awful, unsatisfied longing for Spenser, the terrible knowledge that he was within a mile of me and I couldn't send for him, the knowledge—just as bad in a different way—that we might meet accidentally. I shouldn't have known what to do. . . . Father, of course, imagined that I'd been thrown over, and he was very stern if any one ever mentioned Spenser's name. . . . And I . . . I thought it best to leave things where they were ; no girl likes to have it thought—and *said*, as I'm sure Mrs. Brander-Wilson was saying—that a man has grown tired of her ; but George Creal was coming, and I felt that he would be a sufficient answer for North Oxford.

I think he was a sufficient answer for *me* ; I certainly couldn't have lived through the separation from Spenser if I hadn't had that vision ahead. The announcement, the wedding, the marvellous life that I'd already half planned. . . I wasn't in love with George, I couldn't have been—ever ; but he would be giving me so much instead, and love isn't essential to marriage if your house, your income, your life are big enough. Spenser would perhaps think that I had sold myself ; one night, when I was worried beyond bearing, I conjured up again that wonderful home which I was going to make, and in every room I seemed to be followed by a sort of ghost—it hadn't Spenser's face, but it spoke with his voice— ; and the ghost said something like :

"My compliments ! Your ladyship has everything here but—love !"

Well, I was half asleep and half awake ; and that taunt worried me : Spenser's *ghost* gave me an absurd idea that he might commit suicide. In the morning I realized that

he was far too level-headed for that, and immediately I had my answer ready for the ghost :

“ Everything but love—true ; but, if I’d been married to you for a few years, our passion—which was the only bond—would have been cold, and I should have nothing in compensation but the privilege of pinching and scraping in a distant villa on the Woodstock Road.”

When I’d said that, though I wasn’t comfortable or happy, I felt an immense intellectual relief. And in those days I believed it was true. . . .

3

I could now give my undivided attention to George. He had been plodding away valiantly with our rather pompous interchange of epigrams, growing gradually rather more gallant, I thought, but keeping a check on his pen so that the letters were never anything more than the outpourings of an eager, scholarly mind : even when he was telling me how much he looked forward to his visit, I felt that, even at best, he was saying he must make a careful study of me before he committed himself ; his “ career ” must not be jeopardized !

Mother, of course, had been in bed when he came before, so I can’t tell what picture she had formed ; but, inasmuch as Spenser was out of the way and George was a man in a good position with excellent prospects of every kind, I’ve no doubt that she had marked him down for me. There was the usual flutter of mild excitement, we made the most of our best frocks and rehearsed our poses ; you could depend on the family for good team-work, because we all realized the importance of impressing a stranger with our affectionate dispositions (the amount of public kissing that we indulged in for the edification of any man who came to Hillcrest ! And the laughter . . . to shew our gaiety of heart !) ; and, though Grace was beginning to think I was getting more than my fair share of chances, those were the happy days when younger sisters didn’t presume to marry until their elders were out of the way. . . . I

only hoped mother wouldn't shew her hand too openly, but after our wrangle over Spenser I wasn't in the mood to talk to her. Grace and Joan were prepared to regard him as fair game if I didn't want him; but, since he was my bird, they knew they mustn't fire till he'd flown down the line, though it was quite legitimate to encourage him in their direction. Father . . . *Unless* he was an arch-hypocrite, I believe father was quite unworldly. All he said was:

"He's coming on Friday? Well, I'll take him to dine in hall on Sunday, and you might arrange for a few people to meet him on the other nights. You'd better not tie him down for lunch, as he may have friends of his own that he'd like to see."

I forget who was invited. . . . I know he sat between mother and me the first night; and she tried to shew him how welcome he was by dragging up pointless anecdotes about his time at Clare—fifteen years before!—just to shew how well she remembered him. When he turned round and complimented me on some phrase that I'd used in one of my notes, mother began a running commentary to explain how gifted I was. It was too appalling! I couldn't bludgeon her in public, and poor George had to sit nodding and grinning at the catalogue of my virtues until I left him to his fate and talked to the man on my other side. Even that didn't stop her: I heard fragments like "But then, of course, she had nearly a year in Germany." . . .

It doesn't require very much of that to damp the most ardent lover, but George was more ardent than I expected; he made it quite clear that he found me even more pretty and attractive than he remembered and, personal attractions apart, he was enormously impressed by my knowledge generally and by what he was good enough to call my incomparable wit. (Later on, when I came to London and saw the women he was accustomed to meet, I wasn't surprised that he regarded me as a prodigy.) All the same, I shouldn't have wondered if mother had scared him right away. He was more long-suffering or more deliberate—frankly, I thought and still think him rather dense and

thoroughly conscientious—than I expected. When he came into the drawing-room after dinner, I said :

“Haven’t you had enough of me? No doubt I shall be as bad when my time comes, but there ought to be a time-limit for maternal pride.”

“That depends how well it’s justified,” he answered ; and then he began to pay me compliments that you could see coming a mile off.

Men are always so much better at that sort of thing if they’ve been sitting rather long in the dining-room ; but, though poor George had the best intentions, he was *not* light in the hand. I was glad when I could affect an interest in his career and make him talk about himself. That shewed off my knowledge and flattered him at the same time till I had everything my own way. After a time, by saying something about the wives of public men, I led him to discuss those who had helped and those who had hindered ; as with so many stupid men who realize that they are stupid, his career obsessed him ; soon he was talking about the difficulties of entertaining, if you were a bachelor, and before long he began, very haltingly, to make love to me. He hesitated so much that mother evidently thought we weren’t getting on well and that she must keep the ball rolling by presenting him with a volume of old Cambridge photographs ; then I suppose she saw that she was spoiling her own game, for she almost threw it at George and scurried back to her corner. We pretended to look at it for a moment and then tried to go on with what we had been saying, but the thread was broken. . . . Something jarring. . . . George fidgeted with the book and then began looking at it again and trying to identify me ; he was thrown completely out of his stride. . . .

“Your mother must have been extraordinarily like you when she was your age,” he said, getting rid of the book as soon as he decently could. “I remember her fifteen years ago. . . . They were the best-looking couple in Cambridge, she and your father ; and, I should think, the most brilliant.”

I believe that was true, but I’d so long regarded mother as being nearly half-witted that I couldn’t imagine her as a girl that all her generation fell in love with. . . .

"After all, then," I said, "her maternal pride is perhaps only self-directed glory."

"Perhaps," he said. . . .

And then he became extraordinarily silent. . . .

"I believe they're as much in love as when they first became engaged," I said.

"A marriage like that is very wonderful," said George. . . .

But he wouldn't say anything more, and I felt that I mustn't force the pace.

He had severe attacks of silence for the rest of the time he was with us. My room was over the library, and I could hear him talking happily enough to father; I believe he made himself very popular when he dined in hall; he talked to mother, partly from politeness and partly to keep her from talking to him; he talked to Grace, he talked to Joan, he cracked jokes with you; but he had hardly a word for me.

At first I thought he was just shy and timid, perhaps waiting for me to help him—and I helped him to the limits of decency and beyond! Then I wondered if I'd offended him in any way. No! It couldn't be that, because he was *abject* whenever he spoke—as though he'd injured me or insulted me and were trying by every means in his power to ingratiate himself. I couldn't make it out. . . . When he came back from dining in college, I was reading in father's room; and he came in to say good-bye, as he was leaving by the breakfast train. I'd arranged the furniture, the lights, my dress, myself, everything with a view to my last effect, my final effort; something told me that, if I lost him now, I should lose him for good; and, as I put down my book and shook hands, I told him that henceforth I should follow his career with the eyes of a friend. . . . He said my friendship mattered to him more than anything in life. . . . I asked him when we were going to meet again. . . .

"I'm appallingly busy at present," he said; and I noticed that he couldn't look me in the eyes, though his face had Spenser's look of agony that night when he talked about the hell of uncertainty. . . .

Suddenly I felt that I was losing any grip on him that I may have had.

"Good-bye," I said. "Don't wait another fifteen years."

"You'll hear from me," he said, "as soon as I want any information on any subject—which is likely to be soon." Then he allowed himself one lapse into lukewarm enthusiasm. "You *do* write the most wonderful letters."

"The interest of every letter depends on what it leaves out," I said.

Heaven knows, mine were letters of the head!

And then he said good-bye, and I went to bed. Nothing more! Not even a conventional hint that he hoped to see me if ever I came to London. . . . It was all over. . . .

4

I sat before the fire in my room wondering *why* it was all over, for the man was miserable! I felt a dull despair, but no anger, no bitterness; what had happened was too overwhelming to leave room for bitterness. Whatever *had* happened. . . My brain was quite clear and rather curious; I tried to put myself in his place. . . .

"To begin with," I could imagine him saying, "everybody expects me to make a big match." (As a matter of fact, he married a flighty little Irish girl with big, melting eyes and a quick tongue and a temper that nearly sent him out of his mind until they separated at the end of two years. And, as she was a Catholic, he quarrelled eternally with his father before marrying her.) "Well, Marion Tenby's not a big match; but, by Jove, you know, she's brilliantly clever and she'll be the best possible wife for me in my career. She's pretty; and, by Jove, you know, I'm more than a little in love with her; I think, therefore, that the 'big match' element might possibly be left out. What remains?"

"Well, if she were a tinker's daughter, I could say: 'I'll marry you on condition that you disown your entire family'; but I can't do that here: the professor's a very

distinguished man and a charming fellow, whom I wouldn't hurt for the world ; he's my wife's father and the only one of the family she really cares for. Therefore, I must keep on terms with the family and stay with them occasionally in Oxford. . . . But, by Jove, you know, they'll stay with me in Fifeshire and in London ! I must make no mistake about that ! Mrs. Tenby will insist. She'll write to all her friends on Castle note-paper and badger Marion to give the younger sisters a season in London and then another and then another until they're satisfactorily married off. It isn't a question of not dying happy until all the girls are well placed : Mrs. Tenby won't die at all until she's got them all off her hands. Can I face that ? . . . Well, Marion's clever, and it's to her interest to finish the job as quickly as possible ; in four years we shall, in effect, be able to disown the Tenbys ; and Marion and I can settle down in peace.

"But will it be peace ? How will Marion stay the course ? Twenty years ago Mrs. Tenby was everything that Marion is now : pretty, well-dressed, quick-witted, accomplished—from the photographs they might be twin sisters— ; now she's a garrulous, irritating, officious imbecile with most of her looks and all her charm gone, and a semi-invalid into the bargain. Will Marion go that way ? How *soon* will she begin to break up ? . . . Good God ! I thought she was going to be a help to me in my career ; but she'll be a millstone round my neck ! The sooner I get out of this tangle, the better ; it's been the finest-run thing I've ever seen. By Jove, you know, I'm glad I met the mother and had my eyes opened when I did, because I was growing quite fond of Marion. . . . Saying good-bye to her was damnable, because I rather think she was growing fond of me. Well, no one shall say that I trifled with her affections or gave her any encouragement." . . .

And . . . he . . . *didn't* ! It may have been scruple, it may have been caution : he dropped out of my life like a stone ! When I came to London I met him, of course, as I met every one ; but he'd married his Irish girl by then. One love usually drives out another, and I've no doubt that by that time he was quite convinced—for

the moment—he'd never cared for me. We became quite good friends, and I saw a lot of them both; she was so useless that, whenever he wanted advice about his precious career, he always came to me. At the time of the separation he invited himself to dine with me alone, and I could see that I was expected to sympathize. So I did. . . .

"Looking back on it all," he said, "I suppose the whole thing was a mistake. Yet I didn't marry until I was seven-and-thirty; by that time I fancied that I knew what I wanted. It wasn't the only mistake I made in those days."

He wished me to drag it out of him, but he couldn't tell me anything I didn't know before. . . .

"My dear George," I said, "it's only profitable to brood over past mistakes if it keeps you from repeating them."

"I shan't have any opportunity," he said. "I don't suppose you're aware, Marion, that I once came very near asking *you* to marry me."

"Well, you stopped in time," I told him.

"That was my mistake. . . . Did you know that?"

"Yes," I said, "and I know why you—let me say—stopped in time."

"It was because I didn't know what I—*wanted*!" he answered savagely.

"It was because you couldn't stand mother."

"As a matter of fact," he admitted, "*it was*." . . .

But that was two years later. . . . The night after we'd said good-bye I sat thinking and thinking. . . . The bottom had fallen out of the world! I was so much dazed that I never dreamed of being angry with mother; if you lose both your legs in a railway accident, you aren't *angry* with any one. . . . Despair is a more adequate emotion; I looked ahead—in your twenties, life seems infinite—; and across every road I saw a senseless, hopeless bar. I was beyond crying, but the old phrase fitted me literally: I *did* wish I was dead. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. . . I thought of the *post mortem* that we always held after any one had been staying with us . . . our bridge-book of romance. . . . And then I saw that I must pull myself together.

Men always affect to despise spiritual vanity in a woman;

they don't see that it's our only means of keeping up our price ; they don't even see that it's precisely the same thing as the boasted self-respect of a man which makes him do something brave when he's physically frightened. Vanity came to my rescue. On top of all the gossip about Spenser, I couldn't let any one think that I'd had another "disappointment." George Creal was nothing to me ! Good gracious, I'd only met him twice ! It was very flattering, no doubt, to suggest that any *friend of father's* who came to the house would naturally fall in love with me at once, but wasn't it just a little ridiculous ?

I can't say how well I did it. . . . There certainly *was* gossip . . . an intolerable amount of it, though George had only spent a single week-end with us. I imagine Brander-Wilson or some one went home on Sunday and said he'd met the Undersecretary for the Colonies dining in hall as Tenby's guest ; immediately the wife would say : "I suppose poor Mrs. Tenby is trying to catch him for one of her girls. I wonder which one. . . . After the *fiasco* with Spenser Woodrow, I should think they're trying to do something about poor Marion." . . . I don't know where it started, I don't know what was said ; but every one *was* talking. . . .

I spent some time trying to decide whether I should make myself more ridiculous by staying on in Oxford or by running away ; in the end I decided to run away, even if people said triumphantly that I was trying to heal a broken heart. Where to go, what to do was the next question, for Joyce Armitage was abroad. After my dream of ruling London as George Creal's wife, it wasn't easy to settle down as mistress in a girls' school ; especially when Miss Kirby wrote : "You must not come to King's Norton till you have lost all hope ; and you are too young for that." I was walking along, trying to *force* my brain to think out something, when I ran into Spenser. We were in the Parks, and he'd been playing hockey.

"I . . . wondered if you were going to cut me," I said ; and I found I could hardly speak, hardly breathe. . . .

He turned quite grey, fumbled at his scarf and then said, with a great effort :

"I've been playing hockey."

"Are you working very hard?" I asked. "We never see anything of you nowadays."

"You could hardly expect to," he muttered.

"I'm afraid I did," I said. "Expected and . . . hoped. Mother was rather offended; and perhaps I was just a little bit hurt. You told me you were fond of me, you knew I was fond of you——"

"And you remember," he broke in, "that we agreed it had to be one thing or the other."

"I remember *begging* you not to hurl ultimatums to and fro. . . . Our friendship—our *love*, if you like, Spenser—was too sacred to be made a gambling stake, a counter in a bargain. It rather looks as if I didn't mean so very much to you, if you reject my overtures so summarily. . . . Yet you *liked* being with me, writing to me, talking everything over with me: surely that was better than nothing? If we couldn't be married at once, why wouldn't you be patient and take what I could give you until the time when I could give you everything?"

"Because I *couldn't*," he answered. "Perhaps you were right. . . . I think we were both right. I shouldn't have been happy unless I felt absolutely sure of you; and you'd have been wretched if I hadn't left you full liberty. . . . Liberty to keep me tied and in agony, while you were free; liberty, perhaps, to say that you were tired of me or that it had all been a mistake; liberty to throw me aside like a squeezed orange and marry some one else." . . .

He stopped suddenly. . . . And I've always wondered why he stopped just at that moment. Perhaps he was too much excited to know what he was trying to say—he was beating the hockey-stick against his shin-guards and talking very quickly; perhaps he *too* had heard about George Creal's second visit. . . .

"No, no, no, Spenser! That's wickedly untrue!" I cried. "Must I remind you that I offered to marry you without waiting? And you talk of my throwing you aside like a—like a squeezed orange!"

"You knew I must wait till I had money to marry on."

"You can make money in a dozen ways, Spenser."

"Not in Oxford."

"Oxford isn't the whole world."

"It's the world I know; I've an idea of my own limitations." Then he tried to shift the blame on to my shoulders. "And you didn't care for me enough to wait two years!"

"And you didn't love me enough to risk marrying me at once!"

"I loved you too much to risk anything."

"Am I not worth a risk?"

He could now start again from the beginning, and, if he presented his ultimatum again, I should slowly and gently yield. What mattered to me at that moment was not the joy of marrying Spenser; I wasn't thinking of big houses in London or small houses in Oxford; I didn't mind that the only alternative was burial alive in a girls' school: I wanted to score off mother and Mrs. Brander-Wilson and North Oxford, to say, "*Well, here he is! We didn't want to announce it, because we're not thinking of marrying yet awhile, but as you all take such an interest in us . . .*"

I gave him his cue in words, he must have noticed my voice; and if he'd looked at my eyes . . .

"It had to be one thing or the other," was all he would say. And then I realized for the first time that he was treating it all as in the past. I was *frightened*. . . . "I saw I must try to . . . forget. And I've been trying. Yes, I'm working *very* hard, I scarcely go anywhere; that must be my excuse to your mother. I'm going to Italy next vacation. . . . Good-bye."

He had vanished before I could say anything to stop him! At the turn of the path he broke into a run; and the last I saw of him was a tall, bare-headed figure, with a white sweater flapping at his back, going at a jog-trot. . . . He was swinging the hockey-stick and occasionally hitting carelessly at pebbles. . . . I walked on till it was dark enough for me to come safely into roads and places where I was likely to meet people.

Even while he was talking to me, I believe I realized what had happened, and I've seen it so often since. When he'd decided that I wasn't going to marry him, he'd turned to

any one who would be the least little bit sympathetic ; that and work were the best way of forgetting. . . . Later in the term I heard that he'd been seen about with a girl ; Mrs. Jacomb told mother that she was some one he'd met in Switzerland and promised to shew round Oxford—"one of these girls with just enough money to move from one hotel to another abroad until they meet some one to marry" ; I knew at once that it must be the inevitable Julia Sefton. . . .

I believe they all went to Italy together ; and in the summer Mrs. Brander-Wilson reported that they were engaged but that they were waiting till Spenser was appointed to his regular fellowship, which was now a foregone conclusion. By that time I didn't mind, because I'd left Oxford and had other things to think about ; I sent good wishes and congratulated them when the baby was born. And once, much later, I actually called on her. Spenser was out—I never saw him after that meeting in the Parks—, but she gave me tea and shewed me the child ; she was a very ordinary, domestic, homely little woman in those days, and I believe they were very happy together in a smug, subdued, colourless way. The romance of his life had been given to me ; and I'd given mine to him. I didn't grudge him in any way ; the yearning I'd felt for Spenser was quite natural, but I had just enough conventionality left in me to be rather ashamed of any natural, healthy appetite. As you would say, dear Ada, it's hardly *decent* for a woman to have any passions ; and it's certainly indecent for her to admit them even to her own sister, when everything's dead and cold and there's not much time left for admitting anything. . . .

5

There's only one episode more in the Oxford chapter. When I'd had time to recover from my meeting with Spenser, I talked seriously to father about finding work ; he knew or guessed or surmised enough to feel that a very little more of the Hillcrest life would send me raving mad

and, as he could see I wasn't anxious to become a school-marm, he tried to discover an opening for me in London. Those were the early days of the *London Quarterly Review*, and father wanted to get me a position where I could devil for the editor in some rather important, confidential capacity, removed from the ordinary turmoil and squalor of Fleet Street. The obvious man to help us there was the great Martin Shelley, who was rising from strength to strength in journalism, though even now people were beginning to say that he "did himself rather well" (very soon they said without any disguise that he *drank*. . .). An introduction and some personal propaganda from him . . .

We invited him for a week-end and talked about different kinds of work; Martin was full of his own triumphs and assured us that he could get me anything for the asking; he was such a power that no one dared say him nay, and he painted the rosiest possible picture of what I might do and become. A *word* from him to the editor of the *London Quarterly*! I might consider myself appointed. . . .

That left him free to double back and tell us again how ministers crawled to him for a smile and how the chancelleries of Europe trembled at a leader from Martin Shelley. . . . It was partly just boasting, but there was some foundation for it; and I began to see that, in his way, Martin was almost more influential than a man like George Creal. He was an unofficial power, but he rolled out the big names quite as easily; and he was more permanent, if he only kept his drinking in check, than a man who retired with the government of the day. . . . Without any kind of doubt, Martin—through the back-door of journalism—had forced his way into the great world. . . .

I asked myself suddenly why, instead of coming to him for a recommendation, I didn't just marry him. . . .

You were too young, I expect, to notice or understand; but in those days, as I told you, Martin made love to every woman he met. Partly, I think, he fancied that they liked it, and most women *do*; partly he was very susceptible; and partly he was so full of enthusiasm for whatever he was discussing that he infected every one else until they

all responded, and that in turn reacted on him till he thought they were the most intelligent and charming people in the world. And then he'd leave what he'd been talking about and transfer his enthusiasm. The first time he came to Hillcrest, he made love to me *and* Grace *and* Joan within an hour, starting afresh with mother at the beginning of dinner. He was known to be like that, and at least in London nobody took him seriously. One or twice he went perhaps farther than he had intended, but he always pulled himself up and escaped by saying that he wasn't a marrying man.

I wondered. . . .

And once, I believe, he slipped out of an engagement by sending his friends to warn the girl's father that he was an habitual drunkard and was openly living with another woman at the time. Master Martin was up to every ruse. . . .

As usual, I left nothing to chance ; I reviewed everything beforehand—his position, prospects, income and the like. George Creal had told me he had some private means and quite a good house near Sloane Square, where he entertained rather Bohemian parties : he was dramatic critic of the *Night Gazette* and a free-lance in the most liberal sense of the word that, whenever a really overwhelming article was wanted, he was commissioned to write it. For some time, from what he told me, I gathered that he'd had no leisure for books or plays, but, as he never published those he'd written, that didn't make any difference. He boasted, though, that, if he could ever polish up all his old things and collect his scattered articles—if only, he said, he could learn *method*—, there was a fair-sized gold-mine in some of the cupboards of his library.

Those were the assets. . . .

The liabilities. . . He was utterly undomesticated, irregular, inconsiderate ; he'd never had to think of any one but himself ; he drank too much and was becoming a little bit bloated, a little bit slovenly and unkempt ; he quite honestly thought he wasn't a marrying man, certainly he didn't want to marry me. . . .

I set the one off against the other and decided it was worth it : there'd be no difficulty in making him fall in

love with me, and I honestly believed that I could reform him ; before he'd had time to fall out of love, he'd find that I'd doubled his output, multiplied his income by ten and was helping him in his work and organizing it until he'd wonder how he ever got on without me. I would undertake to teach him method. . . In return, he would be rescuing me from North Oxford ; through him I should come to know the literary people and, when I'd put myself at their head, I could secure every one else. Martin had been lionized long enough by now to be rather contemptuous about it. "Any one can be a 'brilliant hostess' nowadays," he said. "The new young poet comes because you say you've invited a duchess ; the duchess comes because you say you've invited a new young poet ; all you have to do then is to feed them well, and the fashionable press calls it a galaxy of wit." I felt I could allow Martin to be contemptuous if I could count on his help when I needed it. . . .

As he had come to Hillcrest simply to talk *to* me and *about* me, I had no difficulty in keeping him to myself. The first night we did discuss business until dinner, but afterwards—I found he was a different man after dinner—I let him talk about himself. The next day I talked about *him* : his work, and all that he wasted by not organizing his life properly. Method. . . He was flattered and touched when I took an interest in all the unpublished things and asked if I might see some of them. When he'd enlarged on them for a time, we agreed to have a go at them together and see what could be published.

That was his last night, and I saw that he was following his usual course ; first of all immense enthusiasm for the plays and novels, then for me, because of my sympathy and intelligence. . . . Father had gone to his room, leaving us to make all arrangements about my work in London ; mother was in bed ; Martin and I were in the drawing-room. First of all he was enthusiastic, then amorous ; I checked him for a time by letting him see that I knew too much about him to be deceived by his gallant speeches, and that roused him to justify himself. He made the stock defence with all the stock sentiments, demanding to

know why I wouldn't believe him ; it was very long, and he had frequent recourse to the whisky-decanter, but, if he didn't convince me, he convinced himself. Then I allowed my manner to change ; and, when he gave me my cue, I took it before he could escape. . . .

"Father has no idea," I added, "unless you've given him a hint." . . .

Then for the first time he realized that the trap had closed.

"I'm afraid he doesn't regard me very favourably," said Martin diffidently.

I knew what that meant ! He'd try to wriggle out of it by saying he'd proposed to me without reflecting what a dissolute character he was ; he'd try to make father forbid the engagement. And he was clever and persuasive enough to succeed. . . .

"Talk to him in the morning," I said.

But *I* burnt his boats by telling father that night. Martin was never so adroit or convincing in the early morning : he so often overslept himself. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

I

I'VE had to play some difficult parts in my life, but I can't think of anything more difficult than pretending to be ecstatic about marriage with a man you aren't in love with, a man who quite clearly isn't in love with you. . . . It would have been easier if *any* one had supported me, but I can only describe the atmosphere of Hillcrest as dismay tempered by resignation.

"*Martin Shelley!*" cried father, jumping up and scattering books and papers on the floor. "My dear, we must have time to think about this. It's all very sudden, you haven't seen very much of each other." He stooped down and began to collect his books and glasses. "I suppose I shall have to lose you sometime, but I'm not sure that in all ways *Martin Shelley*, you know . . ."

Dear father! The only question in his mind was whether Martin would make me happy. He so loved having us all at home that he never joined in any of mother's schemes for marrying us off. . . .

"Don't damp my happiness!" I begged. "You, of all people!"

He *wanted* to ask me whether I thought for a moment that I *should* be happy; if he'd been a little bit braver or a little bit more sure of himself, he'd have hinted very gently that I was marrying Martin because I'd misfired twice in a fortnight with Spenser and George; but that was such a horrible thing for a man to say to his own daughter.

"I was only thinking that Martin's a good deal older

than you, my dear ; he's led a very different life, rather Bohemian." . . .

"He'll drop all that when we're married," I said.

You remember that father never dressed for dinner if he could possibly avoid it. I felt a shaggy sleeve on my shoulders, my cheek pressed against a shaggy, smoky coat ; father was saying rather tremulously :

"We'll think about it, my dear. Only the very best is good enough for you, and I've not been very successful in securing you that." . . .

What children we are in the way we shrink from ugly words ! Father meant that Martin *drank* too much, and I knew he meant it, and he knew that I knew. But neither of us used the word ! I only hoped that Martin wasn't drowning his consternation in the remains of the whisky decanter, for I was resolved to confront him with father that night and I wanted him to cut a good figure. . . . Poor father didn't know what to say or think, and I didn't want to waste all my vitality on him when I needed it to keep Martin up to the mark and to persuade myself that I could carry everything off with a certain conviction.

I suggested that we should go back to the drawing-room. . . .

"I can't consent to anything *yet*," said father, but I wasn't thinking about him ; I was thinking about Martin, whether he'd try to make a bolt. . . .

The meeting wasn't quite so difficult as I'd expected. Father, of course, who was always childishly sentimental, looked for great excitement and radiance ; and Martin was certainly excited. The radiance wasn't quite so noticeable, perhaps, but less than a quarter of an hour had passed since he'd reproached me for not taking him seriously, and it was too soon for him to cool down. Father just said that he understood we considered ourselves engaged, Martin struck an attitude, I looked determined to father and adoring to Martin, and that was all ; we were all to go to bed, and father would think things over and talk to us in the morning.

As soon as I'd made sure that Martin wasn't staying behind to explain himself away, I went upstairs and spread

the news. Mother was asleep, so I didn't disturb her; but I told Grace and Joan with all the rapture I could put into my voice. Joan said:

"Mr. Shelley? You haven't wasted much time."

Somehow . . . I'd never been able to forgive Joan that.

Grace said:

"Mr. Shelley? When are you going to be married?"

I don't know whether they saw that the rapture was artificial; they wouldn't have cared if they had. Grace was only wondering how soon she'd have to take over the housekeeping in my place and they were both telling themselves that there was *one* obstacle out of their way. . . . I worked them up to a certain pitch of enthusiasm, because I was rather nervous about father and wanted all the allies I could collect; and, to do it, I recalled what Winnie Orm had been like and cribbed the very phrases that she'd used to me about Claud Ashwin! Then I went to your room, but you were only thrilled—as any child is—at the idea of a wedding in the family. Then I went to bed and dropped straight off to sleep. What was there to keep me awake? I'd said good-bye to romance and love when I parted from Spenser Woodrow; I'd thrown ambition aside when George Creal would have nothing to do with me. Now I had concluded a satisfactory contract which—at the cost of living with Martin Shelley—would secure to me fifty *per cent.* of what I had once expected of life—and fifty *per cent.* more than I'd been expecting for the last few days. I could be no more excited or dismayed than if I'd been given a moderate position in some rather uncongenial business and told that the future must depend on myself. . . .

I went into mother's room as soon as she was awake. She said—very slowly—"Martin *Shelley*," as though any other Martin would have been easier to understand. And then I could see the two sides of her brain working in conflict: "*One* daughter gone, thank God!" "*But the man drinks.*" It was a long, hard struggle, but in the end she yielded to relief that I was off her hands. A curious thing! Before father would give his consent, he said it was his duty to warn me that Martin was free-living as regards drink—and other things; he'd promised to mend his ways, but did I

feel competent to see that he kept his promise? Mother. . . She never said a word for fear I might break off the engagement and linger on at Hillcrest!

And yet I don't blame her. As I told you, I've no grievance against anybody; and, whatever she did, I'd always find excuses for a mother with four daughters, moderate means and no sons. Besides, she belonged to the generation that believed a woman to be a disgrace and a failure unless she married; mother was fully determined to see us all "established" before she died, though as a matter of fact she died two months after my marriage. I had no idea that she was so ill; if I'd known, I suppose I should have been more patient with her, but, *not* knowing and *only* conscious that she was goading me to madness, I don't feel the least remorse for bludgeoning her occasionally. That, I suppose, is what makes you call me "hard"; I'm simply not sentimental, and, if you rap your children over the knuckles for making a nuisance of themselves, you should rap your parents when they reach second childhood. . . . But then I hold that affection has to be earned between parents and children, not assumed: I loved father, because he would do anything for me, but mother regarded us all as encumbrances who were embarrassing her old isolated life with him. We were intruders who had interrupted her honeymoon, and she was jealous of us.

By the time I left mother's room I'd collected so many allies that father was overwhelmed: he took me aside to utter his one warning, and then the struggle was over. And, if he was overwhelmed, Martin was *crushed*! He came down to breakfast, looking white and ill; he shook hands—with such a cold hand!—; you three began to buzz round him; father called you to order; and then mother came in with a smile broad enough to block all hope of retreat. Unless he'd bribed a doctor to pronounce him unfit for marriage. . . . Martin was always useless in the morning till he'd had something to set the machine working. As I knew. Even before father'd given his consent, we were talking about dates and arrangements; the announcement appeared next day. I went to London

a week later to see about clothes . . . and had the luck to travel up with my oldest, dearest friend, Mrs. Brander-Wilson !

" Oh, my *dear*, I want to hear *all* your wonderful news ! " she gushed. " You're very happy ? You must tell me about Mr. Shelley. It was such a surprise to us all. "

" There's not much to tell, " I said. " He was one of father's pupils at Clare, you must know him by name, of course ; we're being married as soon as his house has been done up. "

" But you've been such a little *mouse*, none of us even *suspected* ! " "

" I didn't think it was any one else's business. "

That nettled her ; and I saw her cheeks becoming rather pink as she prepared a stab in return.

" From the way you went on, " she said, " every one thought you were going to marry young Woodrow. "

" And live in North Oxford all my life ? That would be intolerable ! It's a narrow, mean life ; I prefer some place where you can breathe, where you meet live people. "

We were married at St. Cradock's, with full university honours. Miss Kirby wrote from King's Norton to say : "*I wish you all happiness. Knowing nothing of your husband, I cannot very well congratulate you, but I am thankful that you have abandoned your desperate idea of thinking that you have any other vocation than marriage. . .*" Joyce Armitage wasted sixpence in telegraphing the one word "*Fool.*" She may have fancied she was being strong-minded, but I chose to think that in the long run the fool is the woman who gives herself away. George Creal sent me most touching good-wishes and a set of William Morris ; Spenser paid no attention of any kind ! (A few months later his own engagement was announced, and he was married without waiting the full two years. I sent him congratulations and received a short and rather stilted letter of thanks. A year later I saw that a son had been born.). . . Our honeymoon we spent in Spain, collecting furniture for the house in Chelsea ; and we were still there when I heard of mother's death, which saved a lot of trouble. We passed through Paris in time for the opening of the exhibition and

returned to London in time—well, in time to sit down quietly and ask ourselves what we'd done. . . .

2

I think the months *before* our marriage were the worst. In addition to the ordinary fatigue of thanking people for good wishes, thanking them for presents, ordering clothes, trying them on, being photographed, cleaning and re-decorating the house in Chelsea, which at that time was like a pig-sty, I had to make Martin in love with me. You see, I'd sprung and fastened on him when he was making one of the hackneyed pretty speeches that he made to every woman, when, too, he was more than a little elevated with the whisky I'd deliberately let him drink before I made my spring; well, I've no doubt he knew all that, and he must have hated me for it—which was a bad beginning, if you realize that he didn't love me in the first place. For a time I think he tried to wear down my patience and make me break off the engagement—by agreeing with everything I suggested.

"What colour shall *this* room be?" I used to ask him.

"Ah, yes! What colour indeed?"

"Do you think purple?"

"It *might* be purple."

"Or green?"

"Or green. . ."

But I stopped that by ceasing to consult him about anything. He was drinking hard, too, but I refused to notice that, for fear of a storm; later on, I felt, I could take that in hand.

And one day George Creal asked me to meet him. As his own engagement to Kathleen Porter had just been announced, his action couldn't be misconstrued; and he came (or, I always think, Martin sent him or hypnotized him into coming) to give me a word of warning.

"By Jove, you know, I'm not sure how to begin," he said. "A fellow's not supposed to tell tales out of school, but I've been deucedly uncomfortable in my mind and I

felt I couldn't let you go into this with your eyes shut. Have you known Shelley long ? ”

And then he told me—several things. And I thanked him and complimented him on his courage.

“ But,” I added, “ I knew all this before ” (I didn't know he'd begun drinking while they were still up at Cambridge). “ Martin has more than a touch of genius ; and, with that, I should have been rather surprised if he'd been quite like other men.”

“ Oh, of course,” said George, “ but I'm thinking of you. Will *your* life be very comfortable ? ”

“ I hope so. I think Martin will change when he has a wife to look after him ; and I should never forgive myself for running away.”

That, if Martin really *was* responsible, was his last attempt. It was not an *easy* engagement, but in time I fancy he became more resigned to the idea of marriage ; and then I played on his self-interest. While we were tidying up the house in Chelsea, I went through his manuscripts ; and, making allowances for his vanity and for his natural exuberance, I found that all he'd said was true. As you know now. . . I'm a very sane critic and I could see that, with a little trouble, we could have a great success. There were six novels and four plays, in addition to innumerable articles which only needed sifting and arranging before they were reprinted ; only two of the plays were much good, but the novels all did well—indeed, they were the major part of our income for six years. I also found several manuscripts which had been sent him for his opinion and which he'd simply thrown on one side ; most of them were very poor stuff, and I just returned them to the authors, but one or two shewed a spark of promise, and I suggested that he should offer a few pounds to buy them outright and work them up into something presentable. That proved to be the best stroke of business I ever did for him, but I'll come to that later ; the important thing at the moment was that, as I revived his interest in work and shewed him that I was going to be a real help to him, he gradually forgot his resentment.

After that, it was comparatively plain sailing : his

spirits improved—as also his habits—, he became his old self, we suddenly found that we were friends. Men like to fancy there's no limit to the flattery that a woman will swallow, but I can think of men who are just as great gluttons ; and, so long as I kept myself in the background and played on Martin's vanity, I could do anything with him. One day I told him, with a solemn face, that I was marrying a great man who with his own unaided genius had made himself a unique position ; for his own sake, I said, and for the sake of his position he mustn't do anything to cloud his genius ; it was will-power, I told him, that had given scope to his genius, and will-power could keep it unimpaired. And then I persuaded him to ration himself : a bottle of wine at lunch, another at dinner, and half a bottle of port a day ; no spirits, no drinking between meals. And I did it in a way that made it seem less a favour to me than a compliment to him, his genius, and an obligation to posterity ! The next thing was to become lovers ; and, if a woman's clever and attractive, she needn't fear failure with a man of Martin's catholic tastes. I've only had three men in love with me : Spenser, George and Martin ; and, before we were married, Martin was as much in love as either of the other two had been. When he came to Oxford for the wedding, father said :

“ Well, my dear, I don't mind saying that you were right and I was wrong. I thought you were only another of Martin's temporary infatuations and I was afraid you might find out your mistake as soon as you were married. He *adores* you ; and you've made a different man of him.”

I didn't tell father what a struggle I'd had, because I knew there was a much greater struggle ahead of me. Martin was reconciled, he was in *love* with me, because, having always been in the middle of the picture and hopelessly spoilt, he saw himself now in the middle of the picture, with a comfortable home and a wife who attracted him and did half his work for him and accepted all his boasting at face-value. I wondered what he would say when I began to develop a life of my own. It wasn't at all my idea that I should play the part of harem-favourite to

him; Chelsea was only Oxford with the added embarrassment of Martin, if I was to be buried in the house, tied to his shadow as I'd always been tied to father's. . . . I wondered how Martin, who loathed what he called "chatter-parties", would like the life that I had in store for him. And I was determined to go my way; if I had sold myself to him, that was to be the chief part of the price.

The first few months passed easily enough. Men—especially young men—think it very horrible that a woman should live with a man she doesn't love; you probably think so too, Ada, because you love your husband and you haven't grown tired of him yet. Masculine reasoning! It would be horrible for men, who are eclectic and fastidious, to live with women who don't attract them even for the moment; that's why they don't marry a woman for her money unless they're also a little bit in love with her. But we're doing it every day, as I did when I married Martin; we're unfastidious, promiscuous; it isn't a moral difference but a natural distinction, like the distinction between clean-feeders and dirty-feeders among animals. The time I dreaded was not when Martin loved me, but when he should grow tired of me.

When I was getting ready to go away after the wedding, father and Martin and the solicitor came into my room with a lot of papers to sign (there was no settlement, but we'd each made a will); Martin was itching to smoke and father said:

"Of course! The idea of asking! Always smoke in your wife's bedroom; begin as you mean to go on!"

He only meant it in joke, but I took that as my touchstone; and, if I had my time over again, I should do the same thing. Marriage is such a tremendous new start, there's so much adjustment and dovetailing that it's far, far easier to secure all you want (and a little bit over) at the beginning, when your husband's enslaved to you, than to get bare justice later if you haven't declared your terms at the outset. I decided that I must never take up a position that I might have to abandon afterwards. There was an idea that we ought to spend all our week-ends at Oxford, at least during the summer; I put my foot down

on that at once ; and, when we settled in London, some of my old friends from King's Norton tried to drag me into their set, and I had to define my attitude immediately. This is all very "hard" and "worldly," isn't it? But think what it means! Mildred Burnley was living at Hammersmith with one servant, a nurse and baby ; her husband was just beginning to make his way at the bar, and they had a tiny circle of barristers who came in to supper on Sundays. Now, that kind of thing was no use to me, and it was easier to avoid Hammersmith altogether than to go there for a time and then to have it said that I'd "dropped" Mildred because I was too "grand" for her. So with Winnie Ashwin : I didn't want to meet an army of young doctors, and, after one dinner on either side, we drifted apart. *Later*, when I'd made my own position, I could include them in my big parties, and they came gratefully, humbly ; but I didn't particularly want them to see me at work, and I had very definite ideas about the people I wanted to know and the order in which I must get to know them.

I'd decided to form my nucleus from those of Martin's friends who appealed to the world outside Chelsea ; the critics formed a *liaison* with the authors, the big political journalists were a bait for the politicians, and the stage exercised a glamour over every one. Martin knew pretty well all the men who mattered in literature, and I set myself to get the last ounce of value out of all. We were hindered a little at the beginning by mother's death, as I had to make a show of going into mourning, and it seemed only fair to spend some time with father, though I'd resolved never to go near Oxford again. In the autumn after our marriage, however, we began to accept invitations ; and within six months I'd met most of the literary people and a good number of the politicians, including George Creal who gave an immense party in our honour. I found that the politicians didn't take Martin quite as seriously as he took himself ; but every one agreed that he was the finest dramatic critic of the day, and I thought it best to concentrate for the present on the literary side, especially as I was more at home there. We had an excuse for inviting authors, and they were no more difficult to handle than the Oxford people ; but, the moment I strayed outside Chelsea, the world

would begin to ask who this woman was who was pushing herself forward. As I've told you, I *was* called a social striver and I suppose it was inevitable; but I didn't want to draw attention to myself until I'd won a position in the literary world which would make the others come on their knees for an invitation to one of my parties.

And I wanted time to study my London. It was bigger and more complicated than I, in my Oxford innocence, had ever imagined. Martin, of course, as a bachelor, had drifted here, there and everywhere without studying the system or acquiring anything very much to help me. I discovered dozens of little circles, each with its own head, each just overlapping its neighbours; I found points of view so strongly opposed that one circle refused to know another; I detected jealousies between the heads of rival circles; and I picked up as best I could—without asking questions, because it was all supposed to be common knowledge—the history of countless scandals, feuds and alliances.

London, I found, was an intimate world of a thousand people; every one knew every one else, called every one by a Christian name, was familiar with every detail of every one else's life; old and young, they were all personalities, and, if you betrayed ignorance, you shewed yourself an interloper in this thousand-strong family. For a time I could play the card that I'd been compelled to live in Oxford because my father was a professor there; they would have given me a few months to find my feet, but after that it had to be decided whether or no I was truly one of them. I resolved to lie hidden until I'd prepared my attack.

The South African war was half-way over, and life in London was drab and unenthusiastic, with all the interest concentrated on Westminster and the new parliament. This gave me an excuse for not forcing the pace, and I had another excuse when Queen Victoria died; but London promised to be very active for King Edward's coronation, and I timed my *début* for that. First of all I ruled out the people I didn't want to meet, or couldn't hope to meet, or couldn't hope to meet for the *present* (though I knew most of them before I'd done). I had been presented, but I felt I could rule out the whole of the Court set—at least

for the present ; and the people who were primarily sporting, such as Lord Inverness, the Daniels, Sir George Eastgate and Oliver Blayne ; and one or two families like the d'Estcourts and the Cliffingtons who absolutely refused to know new people (it was said—of course as a joke—that the last Lord d'Estcourt never dined with any one but the Emperor of Austria, as no one else had enough quarterings). I was long in making up my mind about the Jews ; one or two of them were received, but on the whole I thought it better to draw a rigid line—and to make it known that I *had* drawn that line—, unless a man, such as old Lewison, had carved himself an unchallenged position in the artistic world ; and with the Jews I bracketed all the financial and commercial men—they were generally rather *mal vu*s in these days, though they soon fought their way to the front.

The musical set I ruled out for another reason. I knew nothing of music ; and, though I could have learnt to talk about it at least not less intelligently than the people you meet at Covent Garden, this wasn't my chosen ground : I had to be the specialist in politics and literature, confuting the garrulous amateurs ; it would never do for me to become an amateur myself. . . . The diplomats I *postponed* ; they and the Foreign Office circle have always occupied a position of their own, and I thought I'd better reach *them* through the Foreign Office and the *Foreign Office* through the politicians and, perhaps, the foreign correspondents in London. Martin, of course, knew them all. . . . With the army and navy, again, I should have been an amateur ; in time I could meet individual soldiers and sailors, but as a class they had to be postponed. And so on with every one of the circles into which I'd seen London divided. Of the law, for instance, I decided to partake very sparingly : no solicitors at *all*, except men like Mr. Wilton and Sir Harold Blunt, who had already become historic figures in our social life ; judges, by all means ; but not many barristers. I thought then, and I think still, that they are sterile and oppressive . . . terribly uniform. . . .

My greatest problem was the stage. *Now*, of course, Martin's association with it would be an invaluable asset ;

but London twenty years ago was like what New York is to-day ; actors and actresses were hardly received, you picked them with scrupulous care and, though they had the fascination of forbidden fruit, you were considered a little daring, and perhaps some people said that you took refuge in the stage because you couldn't make any other circle for yourself. To this day, of course, your Cliffingtons and d'Estcourts would not admit a " play-actor " to their houses, but most people think that they contribute a meretricious gaiety to a party ; I decided to go very slowly and to run no risk of giving offence. . . . The Church ? It was painfully reminiscent of Oxford ; but I should have to include that, if I aimed at anything like universality. The Church, I remember, was put on the postponed list. . . .

It took me about two years to get London analysed and scheduled.

3

As soon as the old friends had finished inviting us out, we began to issue our own invitations. Even then Martin, who only cared for men's dinners where there was a great deal to drink and he didn't have to dress, was becoming restive ; but I convinced him that it was a matter of common decency to make a return for hospitality ; and, of course, I was able to add all sorts of bachelors and unattached women who hadn't asked us—those of them who were of any importance to me. I should be sorry to say how many people we entertained that first autumn : Stable and Mackling, the Hoddings, John Furnes, Mrs. Mason, Wilfred Teynham, the Burdetts, Viola Fernyhough. A great many people lived in the country, of course ; and Martin didn't know *quite* everybody ; and one or two never dined out ; but I should think we had the rest of anything that you may call ' literary England '. And I broke new ground first with Henry Bryant and then with Clara Denman ; nobody had heard of either until I took them up, but the moment I read Bryant's *Poppyfields* I recognized genius and asked him to come and see me ;

and so with Clara Denman's early poems ; very soon I was known for my flair in discovering talent.

And I was known from the start for my skill in arranging parties. I'd had so much of that *kind* of thing at Oxford that I knew how to entertain the literary people and could even talk to their wives—until I felt strong enough to ordain that these were not ordinary parties and that wives would not be admitted unless they justified their presence (I may tell you that was a courageous innovation in 1902, but it paid). I can't think of *one* dinner that was not a success ; and I learnt a tremendous lot about sorting and mixing people, giving an *entrain*. . . . Those wonderful evenings, when I sat half-way down my long drawing-room, directing, inspiring ! Nowadays people think that conversation consists in forcing an epigram for every subject, you see them agonizing to produce an effect ; well, I don't suppose any one could repeat a word I'd ever said about anything, I didn't go in for " sayings," but I held my *salon* together and kept every one to the point. My parties were a triumph ; and no one could ever tell why. . . .

Some years later Valentine Arden had the exquisite taste to caricature me in one of his ridiculously overrated novels ; he professed to give the secret of my success and explained that I talked at lunch to a novelist about the poems of a man who'd breakfasted with me and at tea to a composer about the novelist who'd lunched with me and at dinner to a poet about the composer who'd had tea with me. . . . If it had been *half* as simple as that ! . . . But I *did* keep a diary ; I had three or four themes for every one, with my own views carefully thought out, which is what this lazy, parrot generation won't do ; and, if a thing was well said, I took the trouble to remember and repeat it. . . .

With the exception of my marriage, I've always worked on the principle that you should be more desired than desiring : it was far better that the world should hear of me and want to meet me than that I should go out and thrust myself upon the world ; if I couldn't keep people from calling me a climber, I would at least do nothing to deserve the name. And I was very soon heard of, because

the moment these people like Clara Denman began to be lionized, they went away and told the Agatha Wilmots and the Margaret Poynters what an accomplished hostess I was. No sooner was my name known than I took steps to keep it to the fore ; with our strong journalistic connection there was no difficulty in securing a steady stream of personal paragraphs, and in about 1902 I began with things like : “ *Mr. and Mrs. Martin Shelley have been giving a number of pleasant and interesting parties at their delightful house in Chelsea. I heard of one lately at which Mr. Teynham, Mrs. Fernyhough and a number of other notabilities were present.* ”

People who knew Martin but hadn't met me began to wonder what I was like, so I threw a sop to their curiosity : “ *Mrs. Shelley, who is, of course, a daughter of Professor Tenby of Oxford, inherits to the full her father's rare literary taste and ability ; it is rumoured that she has persuaded her husband to publish some of the novels which he wrote in the early days of his career and of which he says, with characteristic modesty, that they were written for his own amusement and he cannot imagine that any one else wants to read them. We, who are familiar with much of Mr. Shelley's later work, are delighted to know that his wife takes a different view.* ” . . .

You must know the kind of thing ; there soon wasn't a day when our names didn't appear. And, when they knew all about me, I made friends with one or two of the illustrated papers and had my photograph published every month or two. Martin pretended to be very angry at first, though I don't think he'd ever objected to all the advertisement he got when he was cultivating a Fleet Street “ personality ” as the Colossus of free-lance journalism.

“ Good God ! you're not trying to be *fashionable*, are you ? ” he asked one day, flinging down an article on *The Revival of the Salon*. “ Running in competition with Lady Poynter, I suppose. To think of the years I've spent dodging the chatterers and smatterers in other people's houses and then to have them foisted on me under my own roof ! ”

“ You can't call Mrs. Mason and John Furnes ‘ chatterers and smatterers, ’ ” I said.

"Oh, the rot will set in later," he answered, "as soon as Mayfair thinks there's something in Chelsea to help it kill time. Why the devil can't people leave us alone?"

"Because you have the misfortune to be worth meeting," I said.

He gave a snort; I saw that I must mix my flattery more judiciously in future.

"I may have the misfortune to possess the figure of an Adonis, but that doesn't entitle Sloane Square to come and stare at me in my bath. . . ." The figure of an Adonis! He was becoming very fat, very unkempt; and nothing that I could say would persuade him to give up combing his hair forward in that appalling Phil May fringe. He was the vulgarest-looking man I've ever seen, but we were rapidly drifting to a position where I feared to criticize or suggest. While I knew that he must fall out of love with me sooner or later, I somehow hoped that it wouldn't be quite so soon; though we'd been married two years, I hadn't done more than lay my foundations. . . . Meanwhile Martin was exploring for a quarrel. "That my wife should have social ambitions!" he grumbled. "That she should prostitute herself to tea-parties! (You won't expect me to attend, will you?) That she should wish to be a successful literary hostess!"

He was still only *half* angry, but I had the feeling that my grip was beginning to weaken.

"Don't you want me to be a success?" I asked, with the least touch of pathos. I hadn't used that before.

"I don't mind so long as I'm not dragged in."

"I shouldn't enjoy it without you. Wouldn't you like to see my success? Martin, if it makes me happy——"

"If it makes you happy," he interrupted, "you're not the woman I took you for. That's all very well for Lady Poynter, who's a rich woman with nothing else to do and no brains to do it with. But *you* . . . And, apart from everything else, you won't be able to afford it."

"Are you richer or poorer since you married me?" I asked.

That put him in a good temper, but I felt I shouldn't be able to use that particular weapon again. I'd learnt

enough of housekeeping at Hillcrest to halve his monthly books and make him twenty times more comfortable ; I did my own marketing ; I reorganized his work, and we were saving money. In the days when he was trying to make me break off the engagement, he'd told me how precarious a journalist's life was ; and, though that didn't discourage me—I *knew* he had eight hundred a year of his own—it instilled in me a spirit of economy that I've never lost. From the outset we agreed that we wouldn't have a family until we saw how we were situated, and I had resolved never to have one ; it would have been an expense, I had just enough distaste for Martin not to wish very much to be the mother of his children, and my other plans would have been ruined if I'd had a nursery to look after. . . .

While we were on the subject of Lady Poynter, I told him that I had received an invitation for us to dine with her. Martin groaned. . . .

“ I suppose we shall have to go *some* time,” he said at last. “ I've been so often that I can't drop her all at once ; and perhaps she'll be an object-lesson to you.”

“ Then I'll accept,” I said, as though I was obliging him by meeting some of his more tiresome friends.

As a matter of fact, if she hadn't asked us soon, I should have taken steps to be invited. I wanted to see her and her house and her way of doing things. By the time you were old enough to come and stay with me, Ada, I'd *learnt* it all, you saw the hostess without blemish ; but I started with nothing more than my knowledge of a few Oxford dinners where the people were all of one kind and you stood to gain nothing by the most wonderful efforts and to lose very little by a *fiasco*. I knew what food and wine to provide, of course ; but I didn't know how to attune the psychology of a party, and Martin was too vague and unobservant to help me. Before I made experiments, I had to watch other people ; it wasn't enough to give parties that were ‘ like Margaret Poynter's, but not such good cooking ’ ; my parties had to be better. . . .

Long before we met, I'd made a monster of the poor woman in my imagination : she was my great antagonist,

the enemy that I had to tear down by fair means or foul and trample under foot !

4

I wanted to study Lady Poynter in order to eclipse her. . . .

You see, I'd only considered her methods from the angle of the people who dined with her. In those days, before I'd become what you call "so hard and cynical," I was shocked at the way they talked about her. *Ingratitude*. . . . Martin and any of the others who had been lionized for more than a week or two made food and drink their sole test in accepting an invitation : " I shan't go to the Maitlands' any more ; there's never enough to eat " ; or " Ross House is the dulllest place in London, but the duchess does you very well." I thought authors and artists and actors the most sordid, greedy brutes in the world. . . .

And then I saw the other side : Margaret Poynter, being one of many women who would sooner die than lunch alone, habitually invited people who'd never heard of her, people who in their way were distinguished, to come and make sport for those of her friends who wanted a new sensation or were so bored with one another that they needed a stranger to let off fireworks for their amusement. She pretended she was honouring these people when she was simply using them ; and they saw through it and used her. Of course they were a little bit flattered ; most of our big literary men are drawn—at best—from the upper middle-classes, they're gratified when people with titles fawn upon them and they like to think that they've hoisted themselves into " society " with their pens. But that didn't prevent their splitting their sides over " society " when its back was turned. I've heard Margaret Poynter imitated and ridiculed from one end of London to the other. . . .

I was determined to be different. As Martin wasn't a peer, as we couldn't afford to live exclusively on champagne and caviare, no one could say that people came to Chelsea for what they could get out of me, and I wouldn't allow other people even to think that I was using them ; they

came to see *me*, I invited them because I wanted *them*. And, if I couldn't keep them from sneering at my efforts, it was because they must sneer or die. . . . Margaret Poynter, no doubt, said the same thing of herself ; but, if you've ever been there, you know it isn't *true*. . . .

The first time I went to Belgrave Square I regarded her as my great rival ; before I left, she had changed to a bewildered child—who ought to have been put on a diet at birth and *kept* there . . . a *gross* woman. . . . It was Eric Lane, I think, who used to compare her with a gramophone ; that night she put on a Marlowe record in honour of father (she'd read hastily through Hillborough's *Sixteenth Century Dramatists*) and a Dreyfus record in honour of Martin's article in one of the monthlies—oh, there was a record for everybody. And there she stopped short. Lord Poynter told the history of every wine in his cellar ; and there was no more cohesion, atmosphere, direction than you'd find in a first-class railway-carriage filled with silent, self-conscious Englishmen. I learnt from her a little of what to avoid ; and I went on learning it from the Duchess of Ross and Lady Maitland—Mrs. Maitland she was then—, who were her principal competitors.

I learnt other things as well. I've shewn you that I was a little timid at first and quite prepared to shelter myself behind the excuse that I had been forced into exile on father's account at Oxford ; I was also prepared to work father for all he was worth. I soon found, however, that it would never do to be timid ; I had to carry things with a high hand and claim my place as of right, leaving it to be assumed that I'd been born and bred in the world I was trying to enter . . . as I'd seen Joyce Armitage doing, when she was nothing but a cheeky chit of a girl. Christian names, for instance : I could do no good so long as it was "Mrs. Shelley," "Lady Poynter," "Duchess," and they were "Margaret" and "Eleanor" ; so I signed all my notes "Marion S." and said on the telephone "It's Marion Shelley speaking," which I soon contracted to "It's Marion speaking." . . . They responded at once ; and, as soon as I could talk about "Eleanor . . . Eleanor Ross . . . the Duchess of Ross, you know," I was given

credit for an intimacy with that horrible old impostor that I never achieved or wanted to achieve, however useful the reputation for intimacy may have been. Father's name I used to explain myself for the benefit of people who knew Martin and were wondering who in the world *I* was ; and he was useful as shewing how I had acquired my knowledge of literature, though I don't think I worked him very cleverly : by way of ringing a change on the eternal "professor," I rather emphasized the "*Doctor Tenby*," and this led some people to think that he was a general practitioner. . . Which had to be explained away. . . . But I didn't have long to use his name at all, as he died two years after my marriage ; and, since he was the one consistently real thing in my life, I couldn't drag him from his grave to adorn the palace of artifice that I was building round myself.

1902. . . I'd laid my foundations with the literary people, I was feeling my way with the others ; the queen had died fifteen months before, and I was making my preparations for a grand attack after the coronation. Suddenly—a telegram to say he'd passed away in his sleep : heart disease, and he'd never told us for fear of making us unhappy ; but mother knew, and that underlay the eternal injunction that we weren't to worry father. . . . Why didn't she tell us ? We would have tried to make life at Hillcrest rather less of a perpetual wrangle ; we might even have come into partnership with her and worked together for his benefit. . . . I doubt it, though ; mother had passed the age when she could learn to be sympathetic.

You remember that, as soon as the news came, I hurried to Oxford. A horrible week. . . . I saw *him* for the last time, still and unattainable, with his kind, understanding face marvellously peaceful and young—he was only fifty !— ; and he'd loved us all so tenderly, and I'd thrown his love back at him and scurried away with some one I didn't care for, simply to escape from the world where he was doing his best to make me happy, and he'd died before I could say good-bye or tell him I was sorry. . . . I saw the house which I *hated* except for him ; and you were all of you still in mourning for mother and the three most pitiable,

helpless objects I've ever seen. I had to arrange about the funeral and everything. . . . You say I'm hard, Ada ; I *am* ; I'm deliberately hard ; and I began to make myself hard almost on the day you were born, when I understood for the first time that life was going to be a struggle and that, as there wasn't room for us all at the top, some one must be left behind or ousted from his place. Fifteen's too young for that knowledge. . . .

I softened a good deal during the week after father's death. At night, when I could be sure that no one would speak to me, I tramped over all the old ground : the field at Godstow where Spenser had proposed to me—and the corner in the Parks where he'd said good-bye for the last time ; shady places on the banks of the Cher where I'd been for picnics in the days when I expected to marry an undergraduate ; and the part of the Summertown road where I'd met George Creal. . . . I suppose I felt quite certain I should never come back ; I was saying good-bye to the place and to father and to all my life until I married. And, when I'd said good-bye, I thought of the future. . . .

Father'd left more money than we'd ever dreamed he had : nearly three hundred a year for each of us and an equal share in the profits of his books. A good deal of it, of course, was mother's money ; but, even so, he must have worked and saved miraculously ; that—like the heart disease—was hidden from us, he was always generous, always hospitable, and I felt the blood rushing to my face when I remembered how I'd plagued him to let me go and work because I couldn't live on my allowance. . . . The money—and his quiet, unrepachable face—put me a little out of conceit with myself and the plans I was laying in London ; I softened very much, I resolved to make a home for you three and to cultivate a few of what you'd call "natural feelings". I was very emotional indeed !

I expect it was only the luxury of self-pity ; but, after father, I knew that Spenser Woodrow had been the biggest thing in my life and I had a yearning to see him. I wasn't going to apologize, I couldn't *explain* ; but I felt it would be good for my spirit to see him. When I congratulated Julia on her baby, she'd asked me to call if I were ever in

Oxford, so I went to see her; Spenser was out, but she shewed me the child—a boy, also “Spenser”. I stayed half an hour and went away, rather wondering why I’d yielded to the impulse and insanely furious about the baby. It wasn’t because she was Spenser’s wife and the boy was Spenser’s child, but because I had no child of my own. I decided that I *would* have a family; then I wondered whether I wanted a family in which Martin had any share; and then I realized that there wasn’t room in my life for children and the campaign I was launching, I had to choose between them.

Well, the soft mood prevailed: I resolved to abandon the campaign, and that though I had Mrs. Jacomb behind me, snivelling in shabby black, to remind me of the alternative I’d escaped. When the funeral was over, I put Hillcrest into an agent’s hands and arranged for you all to come up to Chelsea. I suppose I must have grown so used to managing Martin that I overestimated my powers; he pulled a long face, when I told him what I’d done, and said that he was only prepared to provide a home for the three of you until you’d found one for yourselves; Grace was quite old enough to do it, and it wasn’t as if you hadn’t anything to live on. Still in the dutiful mood of “natural feelings”, I was obstinate; and we had our first serious quarrel, which began when Martin walked out of the house and ended only when I’d found a flat for you in the neighbourhood. I told you that I’d felt my grip on him weakening; in the trial of strength he not only beat me but shook off all my old influence, so that, when he came back, I wasn’t even harem-favourite, and, when I tried to keep him from drinking, he told me not to treat him like a child. . . .

As most people will tell you how clever and successful I’ve always been, it’s well that you should know how I overreached myself. But for that moment’s emotionalism in Oxford, I might have kept him, but I was trying to do too much. . . . When peace was restored, I took stock of the position. I wasn’t anxious now to have a family (I told myself—almost convincingly—that I didn’t see how the Woodrows could afford to bring up their boy); I couldn’t act mother to you, though I was honest enough

to be relieved—except when I thought of my last sight of father—; there was nothing for it but to go on where I'd left off.

The day before I came out of mourning, I sent out the invitations for my first big general party, And I thought at the time that three hundred a year, another six pounds a week, would come in very usefully indeed !

CHAPTER SIX

I

YOU'VE read Agatha Wilmot's *London Memories*? A wonderful catalogue of names and places, compiled by a thoroughly second-rate woman with no power of analysis. On the strength of a diary, a sketch-book and a camera, she collected a mountain of trivialities and assumed that it was worth publishing for the sake of the people she scribbled about. I've met her in dozens of country-houses, always with a vast album, always plaguing people for their autographs, grouping them to be photographed and spending the rest of the day taking snap-shots of the house. There was a dreary appendix, fifty pages long, giving the results of her malevolent pencil and camera! The most tiresome woman in England; and people invited her everywhere in the hope of being mentioned in her famous diary! Agatha said: "*Mrs. Shelley's gatherings were, of course, suæ generis. . .*"; and the critics were so busy warning her off these adventures in Latin that they overlooked the more important point that she didn't explain where the difference lay. Well, with the exception of my own, I've never attended an evening-party that wasn't a confusion of thought. Begin where you will! On the strength of always having a box at the opera—where she chattered so intolerably that people in the stalls used to walk up and tell her to stop—the Duchess of Ross used to consider herself a musician: she made quite a lot of money by selling the furniture from the east drawing-room at Ross House—though it was all the property of the idiot son—and thereafter talked about her "music-room"; any one who could play the piano, violin or penny whistle was coaxed into giving a "recital," to which she invited half London. As you know from the

outside, Ada, it's an immense house, but one was always trampled almost to death ; and of the people there three-fifths wanted to talk and one fifth to play bridge.

So, later on, when Connie Maitland gave her poetry-readings ; so, later still, when Margaret Poynter descended from her heights and turned the Belgrave Square house into a music-hall, having the Russian ballet to dance and a pair of detestable comedians called ' Brog and Blab.' So, during the war, when the young married women like Mrs. O'Rane organized what they were pleased to call " fun-parties " ; an excuse for rowdiness, but even the *rowdiness* was half-hearted. They hadn't decided what they were trying to achieve. And people *still* wanted to talk ; though the Russian ballet may have drawn them in the first instance, it destroyed the party.

Now, I realized from the beginning that, though people are always meeting, they want to meet more, to meet at leisure, to talk at *ease* instead of jerking out two words as they hurry away from lunch. I've no doubt others realized it too ; but they were afraid to ask their friends *simply* to come and talk because they weren't sure of being able to stage-manage the party. That was what I set myself to do ; and I knew that, if I made a success of it, I should be giving London something that it lacked and something that it needed. I didn't use the term *salon*, because I didn't want to seem pretentious, and there were already enough people trying to make fun of me—for succeeding where they failed !

My first party gave me the ideal opportunity, as I could fairly say that it was simply a gathering of my friends whom I hadn't met for months and months and months owing to my mourning. No music, no performing dogs ! I just wanted to *see* people. And, when they realized how well I carried off a party of that kind, they would all be only too anxious to attend the next.

The house was very well adapted to that sort of thing, and the alterations I'd made before our marriage were carried out with the sole object of giving me one big room in which I could hold my—well, *salon* really *is* the best word, another room for a buffet supper and numberless little

corners into which people could drift when they'd found just that *one* person they wanted to talk to—or when I'd found him for them; you mustn't leave things to chance very much: it's the detail work that matters in a party. . . . I needn't tell you that, if the house *hadn't* been suitable, I'd have made Martin take another; there *was* just a moment when he was wax in my hands. I broke up my long drawing-room into little *caves*, each communicating with the next, and I kept a commanding position for myself from which I could direct the conversation. You've seen a group of boys practising catches; well, *I* threw the ball, it was returned to me, I threw it again, called for it, had a few catches by myself, tossed it gently to some one who was hoping it would come his way but not too fast. . . . No one *dared* to be inattentive. . . . Or, if you like, I was the Speaker, calling on members when I thought a *certain* one could contribute a certain *something*, but, of course, summarizing, helping, directing more than the Speaker can ever do. . . . No one had seen it done in that generation . . . or for I don't know how long before. . . . Calculated, dovetailing selection and coöperation, instead of panic-mob and trusting to luck. . .

Quite naturally, *quite* spontaneously, as soon as I'd collected a few of the people who really mattered, I led the conversation that night to the work of the nineties (Martin's article on the subject was being widely discussed). For some months there'd been a revival of interest, started by the publication of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and helped on its way by Oscar Wilde's death. . . . Later, the publishers began to reissue his books; we had volumes of Dowson and albums of Beardsley. I was one of the first to see that a certain school which was without knowledge, balance, the great English tradition would try to foist on to the nineteen-hundreds a mass of stale, third-rate work which, almost without exception, must have died a natural death but for the sinister, irrelevant glamour surrounding Wilde's name. I determined to stop that; it *had* to be stopped if one cared for great literature as distinct from the exotics of an overheated public-house; and, if I was to count for anything, I had to be in a position

to override the snobberies of the moment and to say what could definitely be rejected as *not first-rate*. . . .

"Though Wilde's plays," I said, "are amusing trifles to chuckle over in a train, they are—always excepting *The Importance of Being Earnest*—crude drawing-room melodrama thinly disguised with irrelevant, mechanical epigram and sententious omniscience."

Martin, who knew him best, joined issue and claimed that his conversation at least was first-rate. I let Eric Lane, who was just beginning to write plays, catch my eye; and he took the line that Wilde was hypnotized by his love of titles and by the foolish paradox that nature copied art: glamourised by the memory of luncheon with a duchess, Wilde imagined a world of brilliant, beautiful, rich, high-born boys and girls who talked and lived as he would have liked to live. He imposed on the middle-classes, because he tried to conceal his own middle-class origin by sneering at them; and in time he hoped to impose on the aristocracy and set it copying him. Then Ryman, the artist, explained how much of Wilde's wit was lifted wholesale from Whistler. . . .

It was a marvellous evening. My first and completest conquest was—Guess! . . . *Martin!* He had objected and protested and criticized, begging me to abandon this pathetically ludicrous attempt to become a "fashionable hostess"; *until we sat down to dinner at the same table*, I wasn't sure that he wouldn't make an eleventh-hour bolt; and, if you remember him when he finally got out of hand and lost all self-respect—those ghastly nights when I had to ask Eric Lane and Tony Forlim to take him *away* and keep him at his club till the party was over!—, you'll believe me when I say that I *never* knew when he might be tempted to misbehave. . . . *That night* I succeeded because I took him by surprise: I wasn't the "fashionable hostess", I was the wife of Martin Shelley, his shadow. . . . To the end he was vainer than a peacock, and, when the snobs began to fawn on him, I knew my party was safe. . . . When they'd all gone, we stood alone in the drawing-room, both a little tired, both still a little excited; Martin took my arm and kissed me.

"Well, my dear, you made a great success of it," he said rather awkwardly. "God knows how many chatter-parties I've been let in for during the last ten years; this was definitely less tiresome than most. There was some good talk."

"They had you to give them a lead," I told him. "I love listening to good conversation."

"If you give another of the same kind, you must let the men smoke," he suggested.

If I gave another. . . So Martin was coming into partnership.

"We were so many that I thought it might be rather overpowering," I said. "Next time we might have rather fewer."

"Or the maids might hand round cigarettes and cigars when they bring in the sandwiches and drinks. . . . You did it very well, Marion: you kept the bores well in hand; and you gave other people a chance. I was quite proud of you when I saw you ruling the storm. "My wife's an uncommon good-looking woman," I said, "and she's an uncommon clever woman." . . .

So for the present my scheme was safe—at least from Martin. But you may be sure that *others* tried to wreck it. It was . . . well, *how* shall I describe it? I suppose it was the first purely *personal* party of that generation; we had soldiers, sailors, poets, novelists, explorers, politicians galore—and all of them like gleaming, silent, inactive shells until I fitted them into position and ignited the fuse. It was *my* party, *mine*! A smile, a word—and Gerrit Verduynen was delivering Marc Antony's oration in Dutch, with Martin—in English—as the crowd. Another word, another smile—and little Fay Cluny was singing unaccompanied. . . . It was like casually asking them to tell a story. In between the stories we carried on our conversation. So natural, so spontaneous. . . . And it was *me, me* all the time. And every one felt it. . . .

Yes, every one felt it, and one or two could have murdered me to stop my triumph. I was taking the wind out of their sails. Whenever there was a pause, I heard Margaret Poynter going round to the new people and saying: "I

wonder whether you're ever disengaged for lunch. . . " Eleanor Ross. . . She left early—on purpose—, the moment she'd seen what a success I was having; left partly in the hope of drawing other people away, partly to shew that *she* wasn't amused and couldn't understand how others could be, partly to impress every one with the number of other parties she was going to. She kissed me, on both cheeks, and screamed at the *top* of her voice:

"Darling, I *have* enjoyed myself! It *was* sweet of you to ask me. Of course I always *read* about your parties and I've *longed* to see one. *Such* an experience. . . ."

Only a duchess, apparently, may have her parties referred to in the papers. To "see" one . . . as though it was a collection of monstrosities!

"Ah!" I said with a frown, "I've put an end to *that* nuisance! Intolerable, wasn't it? That a woman should dine with you as a friend, listen to all you say, join in the conversation—and then earn half-crowns by writing paragraphs about it. . . . And yet I suppose she *needed* the money." . . .

That put an end to the Eleanor Ross nuisance. . . . *She* knew who I was referring to: her own sister, who *was* a sort of newspaper spy. I could attack her as much as I liked because the duchess had ostentatiously quarrelled with her; and I felt I owed myself the little dig about the half-crowns because they only quarrelled over Lady Emilie's extravagance and the duchess' really shameful meanness.

At the same time I took pains that *this* party—the biggest and most brilliant of its kind that season, the model for all others—*shouldn't* be described. Hal Gregory had the thing written up, but I said I thought all this advertising of a private function was rather vulgar. Next day, of course, *every* one looked for his name—and didn't find it! Why not? Well, the only explanation was that this was such a very ordinary party that it wasn't worth describing. . . . *Ordinary*. . . Like those "very small" dances when you invite everybody you've ever heard of.

I saw from the first that, sooner or later, I should have to fight things out with Eleanor Ross and her school.

A year or two afterwards the opportunity arose when Harvey Lawson came over from New York to supervise the staging of *The Butterfly's Romance*. As every one wanted to meet him, I gave a party in his honour and invited him to dine first ; he wrote to say that he was already pledged to dine at Ross House, but would come on immediately afterwards. When he arrived there, he found that the duchess also was giving a party afterwards and had invited Princess Georgiana ; of course he had to stay . . . and never reached me till almost every one had gone. It was quite deliberate, no question of an honest mistake ; and I waited for Eleanor to apologize. When, instead of apologizing, she boasted of her cleverness, I felt she must be taught a lesson : as soon as she invited me to her next party, I refused the invitation ; and *on the afternoon of the party* I set myself to wreck it by telephoning to her best lions, most of whom she'd stolen from me, and asking them to come to an impromptu party of mine. They came. I then gave her another opportunity of apologizing, and this time she was wise enough to take it.

I never had any more trouble with her. And it was a lesson that Margaret Poynter and Connie Maitland laid to heart and remembered whenever they felt disposed to cross my bows. . . .

2

A small thing. . . But Eleanor Ross irritated me so much that night that I determined to elaborate my air of modesty. My list at that time included about three or four hundred names of the people who, like Mark Hawthorn and Agatha Wilmot, with their precious diaries and notebooks had to be invited to *everything* and were seen *everywhere* ; I decided—quite arbitrarily—to leave a few of them out. Not the duchess, of course !—I wouldn't let her think that I was piqued—, but fifty or sixty of the people like Connie Maitland and Colonel Neald who'd rather waste ten pounds on a present than not be seen at a wedding where they don't know bride or bridegroom. I was careful to ring the changes on the people I left out, but there were

always a few ; and they came up with a stiff or a sickly smile, according to their temperament, and said :

" I hear you had a wonderful party last night. *I* wasn't *invited*."

" No," I used to say. " You know the size of my house : I have to invite my friends in relays."

I won *immense* prestige by that, though of course some people pretended that I gave first- and second-class parties. . . . Fools ! I was clever enough to husband my artillery and have a few of the biggest guns every night ; and with the big guns I mixed a few harmless muzzle-loading rifles—dowdy old women like Lady Knighttrider and others without even her position ; Mildred Burnley and her husband, to shew I was faithful to my old friends ; vapid girls like Grace and Joan, to make people see that I gave the same welcome to *all* and wasn't in the least fluttered at having a big celebrity. That was a mistake that poor Margaret Poynter never overcame : if she succeeded in luring Chiavari or Steinhauslin to Belgrave Square, they went to her head so much that she was rude to every one else. And you'd hear her chopping and changing a party because some one wasn't quite " good enough " to meet some one else. *I* took the line that I was on one plane and they were on another, with the rest of God's creatures. . . .

When first I included Grace and Joan, I admit that I didn't see what they involved. *I* brought them in as foils ; but every one assumed that I was giving them a season before marrying them off. I can assure you that I was too busy to waste time on *that* sort of thing. You see, the *essence* of my success was that I was the expert among amateurs : I had a clear head and a masculine mind, I knew how to express myself, I had accurate knowledge and a sense of values ; and I gave to my apparent impulses the care that other people give to their ambitions. I launched my attack against what Martin called the " smatterers and chatterers", the people who misunderstood Henry James and considered themselves literary on the strength of it ; and I cut my way through them like a sword through ripe cheese.

James. . . He was beginning to be the great Chelsea

snobbism, because he talked so copiously about the methods and aims and "early manners" in art. Conrad was turning out his most glorious, finished work in these years, but Chelsea was not to hear of Conrad for a long time yet. Well, I demonstrated that James was without form and void; he wrote some kind of grammar, so that the Americans didn't understand him and shipped him to this side of the Atlantic; when Chelsea found that he couldn't write English, they decided that he must be a genius; when he catalogued instead of selecting, they insisted that he was a psychologist; and, if you suggested that story-telling was part of the novelist's art, the people who hadn't read him tried to corner you with *The Turn of the Screw*. I fought them from trench to trench, as I'd fought the people who pretended that the nineties were a great epoch in English literature. It doesn't matter for the moment whether I was right or wrong; the smatterers and chatters closed their eyes and said "Ah, dear Henry James! *Wonderful!! The Golden Bowl! Wonderful! The Awkward Age! Wonderful!!*" I said that James was wonderful in giving more time and energy than any one else to something that was never worth doing. They were aghast! Should they side with the snobs or with me? Well, once more, I had knowledge at my back,—and they were thankful for an excuse to escape reading any more James. Or pretending to. . .

But I had to keep my knowledge up to date. Living in the heart of that literary world, with people bringing out new books every day, I had to read them, judge them, *place* them. . . . You've heard people say "Marion darling, *have* you read the new Conrad yet? *Do* tell me what you think of it!" On the day of publication, so that they could pretend *they'd* read it and hand on my opinion as theirs! I'm a quick reader; by avoiding the late parties I got to bed early and could put in three hours' steady work while your Margaret Poynters were still asleep, but I could never have kept pace with the flood of new books if the authors hadn't so often sent me their manuscripts for my opinion. . . .

That, of course, brought me quite a lot of added prestige!

To think that I'd actually been consulted by the great Mr. Beyman or the egregious Hilda Wournacott ! But it was hard work ; and, to do my amount of entertaining, I had to be my own housekeeper, if I wasn't to be ruined. And my correspondence every day ! And the hours of telephoning ! I thought of keeping a secretary, but there were too many little secrets that I shared with no one ; and Martin would have refused to allow the expense. If I ever *referred* to all my letters as a reason for not doing something he wanted, the reply always was that I had brought it on myself. . . . Twelve years' hard labour ! And, when I'd read and marketed and written and telephoned, I had to appear at lunch as fresh as Eleanor Ross, who was never called till half-past eleven and then had a Turkish bath. . . . Do you wonder that I needed a stimulant ?

You can understand that I had no leisure to go husband-hunting for great lumps like Grace and Joan. And yet it was forced on me. First of all people said : " A clever woman like that will marry them off in a year " ; and finally " I always feel Marion Shelley has behaved very badly about those sisters of hers ; if she'd taken *any* trouble with them instead of being so wrapped up in her own concerns, she could have married them off long ago." When it reached *that* point, I had to stir myself.

Naturally, I had not laid myself out to collect eligible young men, but among the nonentity foils there were three or four who might just as well be married as not. Grace and Joan were quite presentable, and I saw that they went to a decent dressmaker ; they had three hundred a year each, and this was thought to be much more because I'd taken a flat for them—you remember !—at the end of a lease for next to nothing at a really good address ; and, as sister-in-law, I was felt to be a great asset for any young man of ambition. . . . That—well, I thought I'd leave the ambitious young men to find out whether they were right or wrong ; I *knew* everybody, of course, but I'd never asked for anything, it didn't enter into my plans ; indeed, I should have dropped to Eleanor Ross' level, and life wouldn't have been worth living, if I'd established the reputation

of a job-finder. *Therefore* I decided to marry them both off at the same time before any one could say that the *first* marriage hadn't brought any particular advantage. . . . What I *could* do, by making a man marry into the family, was to bring him in touch with the people who mattered, so that he could ask for himself.

You can understand, therefore, that, the moment I saw George Bartwell taking the faintest interest in Grace, I mobilized all the men who could help him at the bar. Solicitors, as I told you, I deliberately excluded; but I threw him into the arms of the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy, so that, if he *wanted* an appointment, he would know the men to ask for it. I fancied for a moment that I might be spreading my net *too* patently in sight of the shy bird, but Bartwell was always so intolerably conceited that he thought I'd invited the Lord Chancellor as a compliment to him; as for appointments, I imagine he expected to see all three of them going on their knees to *make* him accept something. . . . Well, he accepted Grace; and I then turned my attention to Joan before he found out *quite* how bad an impression he'd made. Appointments! That was heaven knows how many years ago; he has never been offered one and he never will be. And he may thank his own conceit and incompetence instead of abusing my apathy.

Joan followed very quickly. As she was always the lazy one of the family,—though her good-natured sleepiness was more attractive than Grace's austere, ill-tempered beauty—I knew she'd be contented with any one I found for her; Tony Mansion was an earnest young politician in need of a good housekeeper; I introduced him to George Creal, who made him his parliamentary private secretary; after that, he felt he had only to keep on good terms with me in order to step into the cabinet, so he obliged me by marrying Joan, who bore him four children in five years and looked middle-aged before she was thirty. *He*, I expect, is tolerably bitter; but, if he'd worked as hard for *his* aims as I did for *mine*, he'd have no cause for bitterness.

I sometimes wish I could hear George and Tony talking about me and comparing notes over the way they hoped

to *use* me ; they'll say they misjudged me and thought me cleverer than I really was. . . . When I'm dead, you can tell them what I've told you and add that I was cleverer than they were good enough to think me. . . . *I* had my *way* : isn't that the test ?

3

Thank goodness, *you* were young enough not to need a husband for some time, Ada, so I could take a rest and think about my own affairs.

Money. . . .

Strictly speaking, that's a thing I've never had to worry about since the day of my marriage. With Martin's eight hundred and my own three, with his salary as critic and the money he made by his special articles, we were very well-off ; but I wanted more. I had schemes for launching out more widely and I wanted to turn him to the best possible account. If, in addition to my parties in London, I could take a house in the country with lots of small bedrooms and get people down for the week-end, if my friends automatically ear-marked a day or two for me every summer and if people from abroad inevitably came to my house as they went to Encombe and Parley Wood ! I was prepared to slave and scrape if Martin would only back me up. . . .

He was terribly hard to move ! Though I kept our finances in my own hands, he knew quite well that we were making and saving more than ever before. What happened to it ? Why, when he suggested buying a small car or having a holiday abroad, did I always put difficulties in the way ? If I'd hoarded for the sake of buying myself clothes or jewels, he could have understood it, but why should he work himself to death in order that we might lure people to the house with an offer of food ? If he was to work himself into an early grave, he'd like to get some advantage for it.

I had to handle him very diplomatically ! I could no longer ask if he was better or worse off since he married me, because he was actually getting less out of all the

money he made. And it was hard to think of any reason why I should keep his nose to the grindstone. I saw that ; and so did he ; and he struck. . . . Ever since I'd known him, he'd been a big talker : when you surrounded him with men like Arbuthnot and Grainger, he would sit up half the night drinking whisky and sketching the great books he meant to write : *The Realistic Stage* was an old favourite, and the *History of Dramatic Criticism*—of which he wrote not one word ! To give him his due, it was brilliant talk ; I believe that, if he'd even talked more systematically, I might have made notes and written his *History* for him ; but he was always dashing from one thing to another so that I was left with a few phrases and a host of dazzling suggestions.

In the old days he *had* combined with his talking a great deal of hard work, as witness the novels and plays that I found in manuscript ; but, when his will-power became affected, still more when he could see no reason to work, he was content simply to talk. The sustained effort of a long book was too much for him ; and he would only write an article as a *tour de force*, between twelve and three, when he could hardly see what his pen was writing. I've told you that, when I first knew him, several of the biggest papers used to commission articles from him when the subject really seemed too important for the ordinary staff ; he used to boast of this, but I noticed that his boastings became gradually less frequent ; for a time he tried to recover his position and used to write the articles when he thought they were wanted and then offer them to his old editors. It was a terrible loss of dignity, but he was ceasing to care about that so long as they were accepted and he could secure a little pocket-money which he didn't have to pay over to me ; there came days when he was writing only to cover the advances he'd already received ; and at last a time when all the editors found that they had already paid for just the kind of article that Martin was offering to write.

That *did* frighten him ! He came home one night dazed and broken, perfectly sober, entirely unnerved and touchingly humble : he was worn-out and useless, the sooner

he put an end to himself the better, he was a criminal ever to have married me, but, though I might have a drop in income for a few months, I could marry again, whereas, the longer he drifted on as a helpless encumbrance, the less would be left me—in money and youth—at the end. It was a horrible mood ; and he was an unpleasant sight, unshaven and with blood-shot eyes, *bloated* and a sort of fish-white, twitching. . . . And yet, though I'd never loved him and could have little temptation to love him then, that was the time when we were nearest to each other. I wasn't afraid that he'd commit suicide, but he seemed to be incapable of taking care of himself ; and, when he talked about spoiling my life, it was the first hint he'd given of chivalry or—what shall I call it ?—manliness. . . .

I comforted him as though he were a boy, encouraging him, almost telling him not to mind what the nasty, horrid editors had said and shewing him that, if he would steady down, he could regain all of his old position and prestige. . . . He wouldn't believe me at first, but gradually he began to take heart and to think what work he could best begin. Unhappily, he couldn't think without whisky to stimulate him ; and, as soon as he felt warm and strong, he forgot all about his repentance and the crime he'd committed in marrying me. Now it was only defiance and abuse for the dolts of editors ; he'd write articles that would set the world ablaze—and offer them to other papers, *he'd* shew the fools what they were throwing away. Finally—I felt it was coming—he'd never write another article for them, and they should see whether their contemptible rags could survive without him. He'd give up his work as dramatic critic until they came to their senses. . . .

Thank heaven, I was able to stop *that* ! His salary was far too big an item in our budget to be thrown lightly away ! But, though he kept his position till the end, he didn't attempt any other work, and I always expected to hear that he'd been asked to resign. From the day when Eric Lane joined the paper, he understudied Martin and wrote most of his notices ; and, so long as *some* one did the work and the quality was good, Martin was allowed to remain. But it was a precarious tenure, and Eric was acting against

his own interests in boosting up the man he wanted to succeed. . . .

At first I hoped that I could appeal to Martin's vanity by reminding him of the big position he'd once filled and the tremendous reputation he'd enjoyed ; I still pretended that the people who came to our house came to see him. . . . That appeal, I found, no longer moved him ; he would only say that he was glad to be rid of imbeciles whose adulation was a greater insult than the worst possible abuse. I tried self-respect, but he refused to be shamed. Worse than that, he tried to make me responsible ; I'd driven him out of the house, he said, by filling it first with my relations, then with chatterers and smatterers who wouldn't leave him a moment of time or a corner of space to work in peace ; if he'd deserted me for other women (never from first to last did I reproach him for his infidelity), it was because I'd made life at home unbearable ; if he now drank, it was that he might forget how unbearable it all was. . . .

As soon as I realized that I couldn't check him, I set myself to preserve what I could from the wreckage : his post in Fleet Street and our own position with our friends. Eric Lane loyally undertook to do his work and fight his battles at the office, and, though the literary people and his own friends all knew that Martin drank, I contrived to avert any scandal. The craving seemed to follow an unvarying course : two or three days' heavy drinking, three or four days while the effects passed off, a week or ten days in which you'd never imagine that he drank anything stronger than water ; then restlessness, irritability and a snapping of nerves, then another bout. In his lucid intervals I exploited him as much as I could, taking him to parties and shewing him off at home ; he was always rather chastened and ashamed of himself then, so that he didn't like to refuse me. . . . And these, of course, were the only times that I could make him put pen to paper.

I forget when I first admitted to myself that he would never do any more original work. Whenever it was, I decided from that day that we must realize some of our old assets ; and, between the drinking-bouts, I induced

him to give that polish we'd so often talked about to his manuscript novels and plays. Perhaps I hoped that, when he saw his own brilliant early promise, he'd be *shamed* into a decent life (as a matter of fact, the sight of his old work only made him maudlin); certainly there was money there at a time when the old sources were drying up; and our importance increased, and we probably made a few people think that the drinking stories were untrue when we confronted them with this steady stream of really great successes: *The Rebellion at Plummers' Gate*, *The Grey God*, *Ingenuous Youth*, *Jones versus Jones and Others*. . . .

Sometimes I've wondered whether I shouldn't have been wiser to exploit Martin's failings: as I discovered later, almost every one *did* know about them, I was supposed to have married him in order to reclaim him, my friends regarded me as an ill-used, incredibly brave woman who had too much dignity to seek sympathy; and they all pitied me, though it was understood that I was too proud and uncomplaining to accept pity. . . . I *suppose* I owe something to that legend; this was about the time that I acquired the reputation of being preternaturally gentle and understanding, never speaking ill of any one, always with a helping hand outstretched because I myself had suffered so cruelly. . . . I might, perhaps, have made more of it, but I had set myself to win a position on my abilities and not through pity; and one of the hardest things to contend against has been this flabby "gentle-and-understanding" reputation. I don't *love* easily, but I hate as much as other people, and I don't like having to repress my hatred; sometimes I nearly went mad because I wasn't expected or allowed—dear, gentle Marion!—to say what I thought about people; and that is why this is my first relief. . . .

The Rebellion at Plummers' Gate was such a success that Martin was surprised at his own cleverness. Twenty years fell from his shoulders when he read the press-cuttings—twenty years of drink and idleness, and I thought for a moment that he might try to resume habits of regular work; but the utmost he would do was to set to work on polishing up *The Grey God*. That, of course, was good in

its way, but there would have to be an end some time, and it was then that I began to look at the possibilities of other people's manuscripts which were sent for Martin to read. We bought one or two, touched them up, changed the title, perhaps, and sent them to the publishers in Martin's name. Then, under an assumed name, we called ourselves an agency and advertised for manuscripts, telling the author afterwards that, while we couldn't place his book in its present form, the idea was so promising that a well-known novelist was prepared to give twenty pounds to have all rights in it transferred to him.

In this way we ensured a regular output for several years ahead; working with Martin, though I've no original gift, I picked up his method so well that very soon I could turn out a colourable imitation of one of these *réchauffé* novels; and I only stopped when, for very shame, I couldn't pretend that there were any more unpublished treasures of Martin's youthful and prolific brain! Whether any one suspected—except the bought-out authors, of course!—I don't know; it was common knowledge that I'd induced my diffident husband to publish a number of books I'd found rotting in a cupboard. I believe some people paid me the compliment of thinking *I* wrote them. . . .

Thanks to this "widow's cruse", I was able not only to continue my entertaining but to develop it on very ambitious lines. You remember my "postponed list"? Little by little I extended my compass to include people that I'd once thought I should never know: my parties were always so good that a great deal of the work was really done for me, as the high and mighty clamoured for invitations. After five or six years the Court was really the only field I hadn't touched; and I already had my eye on that. I was successful, I was almost happy; I came near to forgetting the disgustingness of living in the same house as a man who was always sodden, unshaven, dropping cigarette-ends everywhere when he wasn't in bed incapable and half-dead. . . .

When all went well and I could forget Martin, the old life before Chelsea faded away; I thanked Heaven that

I had no children ; I was carried along. . . . And then quite suddenly I received a curious tug back into the past : I read one morning that Spenser Woodrow was dead. . . .

4

First of all among the " Births, Marriages and Deaths " on the front page. . . . When you've loved a man as I loved Spenser, the very name has a fascination for your eyes that makes it stand out in great letters of flame against a black ground ; after we parted, there was a corner in father's library that I had to avoid, because—though I couldn't read the other titles—" THE POETICAL WORKS OF EDMUND SPENSER " blazed like a baleful light till I could not escape it. So now : my eye was caught at once by the " Woodrow," I read without understanding what was written, went back, read again, realized that I *had* understood the first time and that Spenser was dead. . . . It was like jumping into ice-cold water. . . . When I had got my breath back, I read on. . . .

It was in Switzerland, the result of an accident. . . . On one of the middle pages I found a short obituary and discovered that Spenser had been beginning to make a double reputation for himself as an historian and as a mountaineer ; he had met his death climbing, though no one ever seemed to know how the accident had occurred ; death presumed to be instantaneous, the funeral out there. . . .

A few days later there was a memorial service in Oxford, and something sent me up to it. They—all the Jacombs and Brander-Wilsons who'd known me in the old days—were rather surprised ; Julia seemed greatly touched and asked me to come home with her. . . . I believe I must have wanted to find out whether he had ever mentioned me and, if so, what he had said ; and I need hardly tell you that my nerve failed before I was within a hundred miles of asking her. We talked—as one *does* talk after a funeral ; and I tried to make friends with the boy. He was beginning to shew a likeness to Spenser : the same grey eyes, the same narrow face and clear-cut nose and chin, the same

high forehead ; and I thought he had inherited Spenser's way of moving, laughing . . . though this may have been quite imaginary. They'd been left very badly off, but Mrs. Woodrow had been offered work in connection with the *Oxford Encyclopædia*—sub-editing, pure scissors-and-paste ; she was really not fit for anything better—; the appointment would last until the encyclopædia was completed—years and years later—, and she hoped in this way—with the aid of her own money, which was about a hundred a year—to make both ends meet. . . .

I thought very hard on my way back to London. Oxford—and especially anything in Oxford that reminded me of Spenser—always seemed to bring up for redecision a question that I kept telling myself had been decided once and for all : should I have done better by marrying Spenser ? A heaven of passionate love, followed by narrow means and life in a society that I loathed, ended by this sudden act of God. Though I didn't know it when I made my choice, I should have had three hundred as against Julia's one ; but, after six years I should have been a widow in Oxford with little hope of marrying again and no other kind of life to look forward to. Surely, now that it was all over, I'd chosen the path that led farthest ? Julia was not only touched but *flattered* that I condescended to come ; and my old friend Mrs. Jacomb was servile when she could spare time from wondering what in Heaven's name made me pay this last tribute to Spenser. . . . It's true that I might have had children, *they* might have made me forget everything else ; or—again—they might have been an added embarrassment. That was one alternative, and I'd chosen the other : I *had* won a position that was unique in London . . . but at the price of Martin. The whole way up to London those two voices were shouting each other down ! I tried to read, and they wouldn't let me ; tried to sleep, and I kept seeing Spenser's face (I wondered whether he'd been able to make even a convincing show of loving Julia, whether he was *glad* that it was all over. . .) I told myself that I'd made the right choice ; then that, whether it was right or wrong, I'd made it and there was no use bothering. . . . And still I *did* bother. If Spenser

ever wanted his revenge, he had it in the fact that I couldn't help bothering.

Only when the taxi plunged into my own world did I feel that I'd left Oxford—and Spenser—behind. But the moment I entered the house I saw that Martin was strung up to breaking-point and that the bout would begin next day, if not before. . . . It began that night ; and this time it was followed by *delirium tremens*. That *did* frighten Master Martin; for several months he drank nothing but soda-water with a taste of hock in it. Then he thought he might *try* to cheer himself up without entirely losing control. . . .

You may thank God you've never even seen *delirium tremens*, Ada, still more that you've never seen it attacking any one you know, any one you formerly credited with being a human being instead of a grovelling, gibbering animal. When I saw Martin mad with fear, writhing and scraping at himself to get rid of the things that he fancied were attacking him, I thought of Spenser as I'd last seen him, running loose-limbed through the Parks, with a spring in his run. . . . Then I tried to forget them both and began to send out invitations for my next party. Three weeks ahead ; I hoped that by that time Martin would at least have recovered from the delirium. . . . To me, sending out invitations brought the same relief as doubling one's stakes after a loss in gambling. . . .

This was the time—in the earliest paroxysm—when I first prayed—in words—that Martin would die. Oh, I could so well understand the mood of women who murdered their husbands ! I suppose there was an indignant subconscious question why Spenser should be killed and he left alive ; and, seeing him in that condition, I wanted to *end* him, as I should want to kill a rabbit with a broken back—not to put him out of misery that he'd brought on himself, not to revenge myself on him, but because he was a disgusting sight, outraging human dignity. . . . If he died, if I killed him, I should only be the poorer by his salary and I should still have enough to live on ; perhaps—the subconscious thought of Spenser, I suppose !—perhaps I should marry again. Martin, meanwhile, had ceased shouting and was whimpering miserably. . . .

I remember wondering whether he'd die if I didn't send for a doctor. At the end of an ordinary bout he preferred to lie comatose until he felt strong enough to move ; though I, though his friends, though the office knew all about his drinking, it was never admitted, and he shrank from confessing it to a doctor. I wondered. . . . And then, of course, I knew that I daren't let him die like that for fear of an inquest : why hadn't I sent for a doctor ? . . .

I sent for one ; I explained ; and, though I loathed everything about Martin at that moment, I was *humiliated* by having to confess that *my husband* had *drunk* himself into this state. Questions, endless questions ; sympathy, advice. And then I asked Eric Lane to come and see me. We had always kept up a conspiracy of silence, and I simply told him that Martin was seriously ill ; could he explain to the editor and perhaps take over some of Martin's work ? He said " Certainly " and affected quite a good expression of concern : so sorry to hear of my trouble, he *hoped* I should soon have better news. . . . I thought for a moment of telling him everything, though he knew it all before, so that we could drop this pretence ; then I felt that he'd be sympathetic, and sympathy was a thing I'd trained myself to do without. So I just said I'd let him know as soon as I had anything to report. . . .

My party. . . For some reason every one said it was the most brilliant that I ever gave ; perhaps I told myself that this was the only thing left me in life, perhaps I concentrated more than ever on *projecting* my personality on to every one there. . . . They complimented me on my looks ; old Lord Dunelm said that, in a long life, he'd met most of the great conversationalists, but not one to equal me in getting the best out of other people. . . .

Of course Eleanor Ross found it necessary to ask where Martin was. I told her he was at Torquay, recuperating after a slight nervous breakdown. . . . And I remember comparing my drawing-room at that moment with the room upstairs where Martin had gibbered and screamed. . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

WHAT year are we in now, Ada? Nineteen hundred and twenty? Incredible! And how old did I look, say, six months ago, before the beginning of my illness? Ah, don't try to flatter me! I'm a dying woman, and the sole last privilege I claim after all these years is to be allowed to die with truth. Did I look forty-five? Of course not, with my figure and complexion; I had a successfully young manner, too. . . . Forty? Thirty-five?

I suppose you're hardly a fair judge: fifteen years is a big difference, and, when you were a child, I must have seemed quite grown-up. I *fancied*, till my error was made clear to me, that I looked thirtyish—a year or two more, a year or two less; when people stopped to think, they realized, of course, that I must be much more; but, when you're leading the same life from day to day and season to season, you lose count of time until you're startled to find the babies all shooting up. If you take little Spenser Woodrow, for example: I saw him as a child; I saw him again as a big, rather precocious boy just before the war; and then in the last year he went out with a commission! Seventeen and a half, though he falsified his age. . . . I couldn't believe that nearly twenty years had passed since I fell in love with his father; I didn't *feel* twenty years older, I certainly didn't look it. . . .

In the life I was leading there were so few milestones. One said: "The last year of the South African War", "The year King Edward died", but there were very few things to date by. I used to hear Mildred Burnley saying: "The year Virginia was confirmed"; but I had hardly

anything of that kind to guide me. Grace's marriage was less of an event than a relief. . . . I couldn't make even a guess when I decided that you and Arthur Venne would do very well for each other. . . . One drifted on, year after year, without thinking of time or seeing that one was growing older. New people appeared, but in a moment it seemed as if you had known them all your life ; old people disappeared, and in a moment it seemed as if you had never known them. . . .

I remember Joan's first child, because I was so angry about it. Oh, quite unreasonably, quite illogically ! I'm telling you how I *felt*, not how I *ought* to have felt. . . . There was a tremendous excitement, of course, and in due time I was invited to see the baby. I didn't analyse my annoyance till long afterwards, but I can see now that I was perhaps hurt and certainly offended at not being sent for at the time of the confinement : Grace and Joan were always such chattels that I'd sold the Oxford house over their heads, brought them to London, found them a flat, sent them to my own dressmaker, chosen them husbands ; they no more thought of protesting than my cook would think of saying whether we were to have thick soup or clear. When they married and you went to live with Joan, I saw very little of you all, but I still regarded you as chattels : if I'd decided that George Bartwell was to become Attorney-General at Gibraltar, he would have *gone* there. . . .

Suddenly I am told by telephone that the child has been born at five o'clock that morning. . . . A boy. . . . Both doing well. . . . And, if you please, George Bartwell's sister—the wife of a nondescript chartered accountant—in attendance and managing everything because she happened to have had three children of her own. That was the first time I realized that, in a certain sense, I'd *failed* : something had been left out of my life ; a great many women have to do without love, a great many without marriage, but neither of these seemed to matter so much as being without children. . . . A terrible feeling that I was being excluded from a sex-freemasonry. . . .

Joan, I remember, was living then in the Avenue Road. Tony Mansion wasn't fulfilling his early promise, and all

they could afford was a narrow, dreary little stucco house with a strip of blighted garden behind and only one decent room, where St. John's Wood met and tried to be "cultured" about music. I went as soon as she said that she could see me—or, rather, as soon as her officious sister-in-law said I might come! An adoration scene was in progress; you, I remember, were being allowed to wash the baby for the first time, Grace was waiting with powder, Joan was practising her baby-talk, the nurse and the sister-in-law were being very active and efficient. . . . I did my best, I tried to be generous, though it maddened me to see Joan smiling over the cot and putting out a finger for the child to grip; at tea I joined in all the baby-conversation; when Tony came in, I congratulated him. . . .

But I couldn't get rid of the feeling that I'd been left out. The perambulator, filling half the passage that they called their hall. . . . Tony took me into the garden to shew how good it would be for the child to play in; hadn't Joan and he been wise to *insist* on a house with a garden? And then—oh, I've forgiven him! It was only clumsiness . . . though I've never been able to forget it—Tony *began* to tell me something about the confinement or the baby . . . and pulled himself up! And from his eyes . . . his voice . . . I knew he was saying to himself . . . 'What's the good of talking to *her* about babies?' . . . If he'd struck me in the face . . .

After tea, St. John's Wood surged in to renew the adoration. . . . That gave me a *little* relief—by way of reaction. The old alternatives were set out afresh: *my* life without a family, or a family with the Avenue Road, that perambulator in the hall, the smell of cooking and linoleum, the eternal pettiness of St. John's Wood thrown in; I couldn't have both, I couldn't blend them. . . . You'd all been to my parties, of course, but I'd contrived to avoid accepting return invitations to Avenue Road or FitzJohn's Avenue (it was *so* characteristic of Grace to go there—in order to be near Joan! The essentially suburban idea of establishing a *colony* in some outlying part of London, so that instead of making a new circle of friends you had the old friends within call and gathered them in for everything). St.

John's Wood was a revelation to me ! Harry Manders and several other well-known actors lived there in those days, but you wouldn't visit them for fear of being thought disreputable ; in the Marlborough Road direction there were at least four very distinguished painters, including Sidney Arkwright, who would gladly have taken you up if I'd told him to, but you wouldn't have anything to do with them for fear of a rebuff ; and in the meantime, so far as I could see, you subsisted on a few barristers, a great many stockbrokers and " business men " generally.

And not an idea in any one of their heads ! The dull little wives I met that afternoon ! They discussed the christening and told stories to shew how intimate they were with the vicar ; they talked about their tennis-club in a way that reminded me of the young cads in Polehampton ; and didn't you have a debating society ? I thought so ! They wanted to know how soon dear Joan would be able to attend again ; they described classic debates for my benefit and reproduced some of Tony's gems. If he'd been prime minister, they couldn't have spoken about him with greater awe. . . .

That did me good, I think : the fact of seeing that Joan had to pay a price for her baby ; and, if she was content with her life, I was content with mine—content to buy mine at the price of *not* having a family. When Grace's first one was on its way, I accepted it without any kind of resentment ; and thereafter—how many children *have* you got, between you ?—I regarded it simply as a habit. . . . In time, of course, *you* married and picked up the habit, but by then I was seeing very little indeed of any of you. I was living my own life and wondering when Martin would die.

2

And my own life kept me busy for the whole of a very long day. Automatically, inevitably my circle increased ; I told you that I was prospecting in fields that hitherto I'd hardly touched : in 1905 I decided to include the politicians. Till then I had only numbered stray friends

like George Creal, stray ministers who came as *everybody* came ; *now* I thought I would take them in bulk. With a general election looming near at hand and all the young men standing for parliament, that sort of thing was very much in the air : the great conservative hostesses like Eleanor Ross and Lady Loring were making a last despairing effort and reconciling themselves to the prospect of two or three years' retirement ; and liberal hostesses like Mrs. Castleton and Lady Benjamin were whispering and intriguing and organizing and saying what they'd do when they got into office. I caught the infection ; and, also, I saw that my influence would be overclouded and my parties deserted until the political excitement was over (the same thing happened later when war broke out : a literary *salon* has no chance against a general election or a European war). Well, I was adaptable ; and I decided to become the political hostess. . . .

Not, of course, in the ordinary sense of the word. Martin wasn't going to stand, I had no one to entertain for. I told every one that I was independent of parties, but that the *theory* of politics was what interested me ; and, as I'd proved to George Creal half-a-dozen years before, I knew more history and economics than any half-dozen men collected at random in either house. The 1906 parliament was exceptional, of course, but I was astounded at the ignorance of the men I met : they were very enthusiastic and very voluble, but they hadn't travelled or thought or even studied the facts and figures of their subject. They'd been weaned on the leaflets of the Liberal Publication Department and schooled in the liberal associations of the provinces. What they *were* good at was cabinet-making : they'd sit by the hour in a circle round Mrs. Castleton, shuffling offices and putting in a word for their friends ; but I don't think I've ever met a collection of men with less political instinct. . . . Their self-importance ! And the pretensions of women like Irene Castleton and Judith Benjamin ! Irene was president of the Affiliated League of Women Liberals and she talked as one who was above the cabinet, above the house, above the whips' office . . . the *interpreter* and spokesman of fundamental liberalism.

Judith Benjamin regarded herself as the official conciliator and made a dinner-party of every crisis and a crisis of every dinner-party. I don't suppose that to this day she realizes how the whips used her and her great barrack in Cleveland Row *simply* to silence the malcontents by giving them too much to eat and drink. But *politics*. . . She didn't understand the meaning of the word!

There was my opportunity. With my foundation of accurate knowledge, with the gossip that came to me from Fleet Street and from the politicians themselves, with my reputation for knowing every one and being able to contrive meetings, I became a sort of private oracle. Ministers sometimes wondered where I got my information, but they soon learnt to respect it; *young* members, especially, crowded to me; and I was the first to shew that, unless the labour party was to remain in isolation as the Irish had done, the old social divisions must be overridden. I can't even guess how many labour men I had to lunch with me (there was no awkwardness about dressing if you didn't ask them to dine); Margaret Poynter treated them as curiosities for her friends to see, Eleanor Ross fancied that one square meal and the privilege of eating it in Ross House would effectually corrupt all the labour parties in the world; I invited them, not as monstrosities or victims or even friends, but as men with brains who had to hammer out this political business until we'd made something workable.

I think I should take the year before Campbell-Bannerman's retirement as my high-water mark in pure influence; I never pretended to affect the course of events greatly one way or the other, but those were the days when young private members felt that they had missions and could carry them out by collecting in caves and talking like secret societies. It cleared their heads, I suppose; and I was useful in shewing them the difference between a meeting of constituents and the House of Commons: rhetoric, invective, unanimous resolutions no longer availed; they had to present a *case*, the case of those who wanted to give self-government to India, the case of those who wanted a Foreign Affairs Committee in the House. It was no use

writing thoughtful pamphlets, no use becoming angry with Sir Edward Grey ; I shewed them how to prepare their case, when to intervene, how to intervene. Then I rested on my laurels. In a moment the whips were on my doorstep ; for the first time my friends looked as if they meant business, the whips' office traced this growth in efficiency to me, I was approached with requests to put the *djinn* back in his jar. . . .

On several occasions I was able to reconcile these little groups with the machine, and the whips formed quite an exaggerated opinion of my influence. So, for that matter, did my young political scholars ; one or two of them were bought off with jobs and honours, so all felt that I had every kind of patronage in my pocket (those were the days when our two brothers-in-law became so tiresome) ; all your Frank Jellabys and Antony Crabtrees tried to flatter me by laying bare their political consciences and asking my advice ; George Oakleigh said candidly that I had all the gossip at my finger-tips and that he came to pick my brains ; and, when old and young tried to make love to me, I knew that my "influence" was needed for a recommendation in high quarters.

I believe I earned a very bad reputation with the liberal rank and file who *hadn't* succeeded in getting to know me : I was an evil influence and a power behind the throne and a great deal more nonsense. When old Bertrand Oakleigh found me taking the wind out of his sails and spoiling the parties in Prince's Gardens, he said that I was "a very dangerous woman" and tried to make the young liberals boycott me. I thought for a time of teaching him the same sort of lesson as I'd taught Her Grace of Ross, but it wasn't *worth* it. I'm not interested in the second-rate, and the politicians of those years were second-rate to a man. Besides, my power came to an end when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman retired and the offices were reshuffled : the new people had their own friends, it was a much closer corporation, and, though I could no doubt have forced my way in, I was tired of it by this time and preferred my old forms of entertaining. The political phase brought me some real friends : George Oakleigh on

one side, dear Lord Loring on the other ; and a great many additions to my gallery of interesting people. By 1907, so far as one can make a list of the men and women who are for *any* reason really worth meeting, I knew them nearly all ; Swinburne was so deaf that I didn't trouble about him, and Meredith was an old man living in the country, and there were a few who still said that I was a lion-hunter and a snob and that they'd sooner die than meet me, but the exceptions weren't many. . . . And the people who came to my house were *friends* and not bored celebrities bribed by a meal, as with Margaret Poynter. . . .

I felt a quite perceptible difference creeping over my relationships at this time, that is to say, when I dropped out of the political world and went back to the purely artistic and literary gatherings. Hitherto people had come because my parties were so brilliant and they were sure of meeting such interesting men with me ; and, of course, they couldn't help admiring the way I dominated my *salon*. Henceforth my regular supporters came because they felt a genuine attachment to me ; as witness Otis Faraday, who *never* landed in England without inviting himself to dine—Otis Faraday, who was supposed to have been so mercilessly *hunted* by me that he came to London every other year for fear I should pursue him to New-York ! ; as witness the hundreds of people who wrote and telephoned and called the moment they heard I was ill. . . .

There were still people to say I was colourless, insincere, a time-server who would put up with any indignity to add *one* more name to my list ; *most* people said I was a loyal friend who gave a great deal and asked for nothing in return. They might have added that, in the material sense, I *got* nothing in return : I could reel off a string of young men like Valentine Arden who came to me until I'd made them known and then dropped me in favour of some one who they thought would be more useful ; and, as they couldn't drop me without some kind of excuse, they pretended that *I'd* run after *them* and that my efforts were making me so ridiculous that they had no patience with me. . . . That from Master Arden, whom I *made*. . . .

But these were the exceptions: my *friends*, I think, have been the greatest achievement of my life. Eric Lane, for example. . . . He stuck to us through thick and thin, bringing Martin home when he couldn't come home by himself, writing his notices for him, going to the theatre in his place at the last moment when he was already so much overworked that once or twice he had a serious breakdown. And, by way of shewing his gratitude, Martin used to lurch into his room at the office and waste his time by giving long lectures to shew how much he knew about the stage and what wonderful plays he *might* have written; he pretended that he was training Eric to take his place on the paper and teaching him the secret of that "naturalistic drama" that he was so fond of talking about. I should think Eric must have prayed for his death as fervently as I did. . . .

One night he telephoned to say that he was taking an evening off and would I dine with him somewhere? It wasn't very convenient, but he seemed so anxious for me to come that I cancelled another engagement and went. At the end of dinner he said he had something to discuss with me, then that it was rather bad news, then that he was afraid Martin was not very well. . . . He did it very gently, with *divine* delicacy, but I saw in a flash *why* he'd invited me at the last moment, why he *talked* so much all through dinner; I noticed for the first time how terribly ill and tired he looked. . . .

"You'd better tell me everything," I said. "He's seriously ill? Is he dying?"

Eric nodded and gave me time to collect myself.

"I'm sorry to say he's already dead. It was an accident. Instantaneous. . . . Quite painless." . . .

He'd been knocked down by a cart and run over. And Eric wanted me out of the house when the body was brought back. He'd made all arrangements: identifying the body, asking the coroner to let him appear in my place. . . . Undertakers. . . . He'd telephoned to Grace that I was to go there for the night. Though I'd expected it, though I'd prayed for it, I was completely stunned; I did everything he told me without questioning, without wondering.

Only when the body was in the coffin did I realize that it must be so much mutilated that he wouldn't let me see it. . . .

Even if I'd wanted to. . .

3

I was so much stunned—unconsciously the strain and antagonism of all those years must have been so great—that I lost all my power of will. One day—I'd lost count of time—Eric came to FitzJohn's Avenue with a black tie. . . . A carriage at the door. . . . I found myself driving off to the funeral; Eric walked up the church with his arm through mine, while I stared at the great, shining, yellow coffin . . . and all the wreaths. I wondered who the bearers were. . . . The church was packed, but I never knew who was there; afterwards I asked him to make out a list of the people who'd written or sent flowers and I put a notice of acknowledgement in the papers. He wanted me to go away with one of you until I'd recovered from the shock; but, as soon as the funeral was over, as soon as I'd seen the coffin lowered, the shock *was* over. I wanted to make plans and talk to the executors about money, I wanted to be so busy about the future that I could forget the *squalor* of those seven years. . . .

In the months that followed I looked out on life as a thing that began from Martin's death; I was untrammelled, there was nothing to fetter me in any way to people or places or modes of living; I was thirty-two and looked younger, I had a position if I cared to use it, there was more than enough money for all my needs, and not one tie or obligation to keep me from being happy. . . .

The world before me. . .

I first wondered if I should marry again. . . . Oh, as clearly as though it were yesterday I remember being helped out of the carriage at the church door; Eric was only four- or five-and-twenty, very boyish and good-looking, with a genuine love for Martin that made his sympathy worth having and with the imaginative thought-

fulness of a woman ; I remember that I regarded him half as my own son—which made me wish desperately that I had children of my own, far more desperately than when little Spenser and Joan's first child were born—and half as a lover. I don't mean that I ever cared two straws for him personally, but he typified something clean and young, the sort of man that I *ought* to have married, the sort of man I might marry yet. . . .

When I returned to Chelsea I told myself that the house would be very lonely, that I was too young to resign myself to a half-life ; and I thought of all the men who might have made tolerable husbands. As a hostess for any man in a public position, any man even reasonably fond of society, I was incredibly good value.

That set me thinking of George Creal. He was Brentwood by this time ; and he'd been to see me some months before about converting his separation into a divorce ; we'd agreed—without putting it into words—how wonderfully well we should have suited each other. Marriage with Kathleen had aged him, and he seemed more cautious, inelastic, precise than ever without any of his old dashes into gallantry ; he was balder, too, and less bony, and the general impression of freckles and sandiness was stronger. I remember feeling how foolish he'd been to content himself with a separation when he might have made a fresh start . . . as I was doing. . . . The fresh start, the idea of making the absolute best of every *day* that remained to me ! Nothing that I can say will ever suggest how compelling that idea was : if you imagine a convict leaving prison after seven years and resolving somehow to put into his life another seven years to take the place of those which had been stolen . . .

The moment the funeral was over I lay at the mercy of my relations and friends. . . . Perhaps that sounds rather ungracious, as you were one of them, but I could have screamed when Joan sat lumpily silent, waiting for me to weep on her shoulder, and Grace brought me wretched little religious books and quoted something that the vicar had said about "resignation" and "the inscrutable ways of God." After you, came the old friends : Joyce Armitage, who had

become a suffragette, and Winnie and Mildred Burnley ; I was happy enough so long as they stuck to the old days at King's Norton, but I couldn't stand it when they reviewed their respective lives and moralized about the mutability of human affairs. I wanted to look *forward* instead of reviewing my past life ; and I wasn't particularly interested in theirs. With the exception of Joyce, who'd become insanely bitter against all men since her jilting seven years before, they'd done better than I had ; Winnie's husband was the greatest living authority on some obscure disease of the throat, and Fritz Burnley had just been compelled by pressure of work to apply for silk. And they were happily married, and each had at least one child.

Mildred brought her little girl to see me one day. . . . A flaxen-haired baby with deep blue eyes and the saintliest face I've ever seen on a child. Virginia. . . . I felt that was her name before Mildred told me. I fell in love with the little creature and gave her that funny gold chain which mother used to wear. She was such a little fairy that I remember thinking I should have been afraid to have her as my daughter, afraid that she would die young. If she had . . .

Virginia. . . . What was I saying ? Oh, the friends who came to condole. . . . As soon as it was known that I was seeing people again, George Brentwood called ; and we had a melancholy and rather delightful talk.

" You musn't be *too* sympathetic," I warned him at the outset. " We're too old friends for me to pretend that my married life has been very happy."

" If I mayn't sympathize," he said, " I may at least admire your pluck and patience. As you know, *my* married life hasn't been very happy either ; and, when I remember that you stuck it out to the end, I wonder whether I behaved very badly in telling poor Kathleen that we *must* separate. I feel as if I'd shirked, rather."

I was still so much possessed by my idea of starting afresh and making up for lost time that I couldn't bear to see George brooding over the years of mean squabbling that his wife had inflicted on him.

" I don't see," I told him, " why you should pay with

all your life for an error of judgement. You did all you could to make a success of your marriage, so did I with mine; you couldn't *command* success, nor could I; you brought it to an end, it was brought to an end for me; and I can't throw stones at you for doing something I'd have done myself if I hadn't been afraid of being attacked for deserting my husband when perhaps he most needed me. It was fear and not love that kept me here; and I'm glad it's all over, I want peace and a new life; henceforward I think only of the present and the future. You should do the same, George."

As soon as I'd said it, of course I saw that he wasn't free to do the same. He asked rather wistfully:

"Are you going to marry again?"

"If love comes my way," I said. "I carry over no preconceptions from the past."

"I wonder if I did wisely," he said, "to go for a separation: it's neither one thing nor the other. I suppose a divorce could have been arranged, though Kathleen and her Church would have been very much against it; it can be arranged still, if I offer her sufficient inducement."

Then he looked at me quite guiltily, and I knew he was wondering whether I'd marry him if he got a divorce. I said nothing, because, for all my talk about not being influenced by old preconceptions and memories, I'd learnt the terrible importance of marriage. I think some one must have interrupted us, for he didn't pursue the subject; but next day he called and proposed to me with great determination.

A strange proposal, if you remember that he still had a wife and that I was still in mourning. But far, far stranger if you could have seen our coolness and his determination! He'd worked out everything with Scotch thoroughness and caution, even the amount he was to offer Kathleen and how the divorce was to be arranged with the least possible unpleasantness for any one; he didn't trouble to enumerate all the advantages I should derive from the marriage, because they were there for everybody to see, but he paid me a great many grim, sincere compliments to indicate all that I should be bringing him. And then he asked if I would like a day to think it over. . . .

"A week," I said with as much coolness and determination as he had shewn. "And you'd better not come here in the meantime."

And for a week I thought it over from every point of view. George was a gentleman, I should have got on with him admirably; he had a big position socially, even if his "career" had not come to anything very much (that might improve when the conservatives came back, but I distrusted his abilities). I thought of the splendid Grosvenor Street house and its opportunities, the place in Scotland, the freedom from all scheming about money for my various plans; I told myself how glorious such a proposal would have been ten years earlier. . . .

And how glorious it was still. It was true that I wasn't in love with him, but I'd never been that; I was rather doubtful whether he was in love with me, but, when he disobeyed my orders and came to call every day, I realized that he was in love either with me or with the wonderful new dream of a perfect wife, a peaceful home. . . . I saw him once, but after that I was not at home to him; it wouldn't have been fair to work on his feelings if at the end I was going to say "no," and I was *fond* of George. Besides, the one meeting was rather pathetic; *something*, I knew, was wrong, and then I realized that, because he'd once been in love with me, he fancied he could be in love with me again by turning a tap—forgetting all that had happened in between; he was speaking in the mood of seven years before, and I was afraid that some day he'd wake up and realize that he had wafted himself back into a mood that was dead. . . .

That wasn't why I refused him, though; I just felt that I couldn't marry a man unless I had a consuming need of him. Once before I'd done that with Martin, once before I'd said that I wasn't fastidious and that passion was not a necessity; and, though George was the ideal husband for any one but a little harpy like Kathleen, I felt I couldn't marry him unless I was *intoxicated* with love. A funny thing: it was that week's delay that decided me; if I'd answered him at once, within an hour or even after a night and day, I should have accepted him. After he'd left and

I'd told the servants that I didn't want to be disturbed, I became demoralized by the self-indulgence of absolute peace. The quiet and protection of that big empty house in which I'd been afraid of feeling lonely! I remember sending Martin's clothes to the St. Barnabas Mission at Stockwell; I made a bonfire of things like pipes and dirty old hats that I didn't want even the mission to know had been his; I burnt his papers and went through his books, asking Dorlands to make me an offer for anything I didn't want to keep.

Then, after I'd ordered new carpets for his bedroom and study, I felt—don't wince, Ada; unpleasant truth is more wholesome than the sugariest sentiment—I felt *free* of him! The house was mine, completely and securely as if there were a moat round it; and my *life* was mine, I alone could order the draw-bridge to be lowered. . . . The postman used to come for the last time between nine and a quarter-past; the man next door always went for a walk with his dog at a quarter to ten, returning at half-past; and between one and a quarter-past, in the old days, I used to hear Martin driving up, if he'd been to a first night; otherwise at about half-past twelve. I always listened for voices: if he came in alone, I could face him, but, if Eric Lane had brought him back, I used to slip upstairs and lock my door; and some time afterwards I would hear whispering and struggling, creaking of banisters, a thud . . . and Eric's footsteps as he crept downstairs again. Now . . . *Now* I knew that I should never again be subjected to that—*bestiality*. . . .

The house would always be quiet; no one should share it, no one should share my life and break into it with noisy disturbance! Not even George. . . . And, when I said that, I realized that, without knowing it, I'd long ago decided against him. My peace was more precious than all the pomp and circumstance of his life; my peace—and a curious fear that he'd be disappointed to find I wasn't in love with him. If Spenser Woodrow had risen from the dead, I'd have raced to him with open arms: I never pretended that my life wasn't incomplete, that I wasn't *hungry*; but George wouldn't have satisfied my craving for love, and he wouldn't have been content with “dear, gentle

Marion," the tired, disillusionized companion of his middle-age. . . .

4

So I told him it was impossible. . . .

I think I said that my heart was dead or my spirit too much bruised ; I tried to make my refusal as gracious and unrankling as I could. And then . . . the tiger strain that we never admit began to come out ! I *told* you I was fond of George. I told you I wouldn't see him because I didn't want to excite him ; when the time came, I deliberately tortured him ! There's a natural antagonism between women and men because our sex-impulse is more insistent, because we give all our powers to attracting men ; and our bloom so quickly leaves us, we're tossed aside when we're worn out, and one woman's not enough for one man. Therefore, while we need them and desire them, we want to avenge our sex on them. . . . Oh, and, as I couldn't forget the old humiliation in a new, overwhelming love, I had to punish *some* one for all I'd endured from Martin ; I didn't care so long as it was a man. And, as I still half wanted to marry George, I had to make him pay for all I was foregoing. And—strongest of all !—when I was saying good-bye to that side of life, I had a lust for power, for the sense of being madly wanted. . . .

"It's impossible," I said.

He wasn't dismayed ; I suppose I didn't want him to be, or I should have been more emphatic. As it was, I spoke with a gentle wistfulness that *invited* him to plead. . . .

"I asked you if you thought of marrying again," he reminded me. "You said : yes, if love came your way."

"But I'm afraid it hasn't," I answered. "I *did* love you once ; but we're both of us older now, and I at least feel that I've suffered too much ever to love again. Love's dead for me."

"I'd bring it to life again," he protested.

"I don't think you're even in love with me," I told him. "You're living on a memory."

After that he had to proclaim his love. . . . Day after day. . . . I allowed it, I encouraged him, I let him think I was weakening. The magic of feeling once again that I was wanted, of seeing a man stammering for me, with twitching hands and a glistening, white face. . . . The sense of power when I whipped him from love to reproach and mocked him back from reproach to love. . . . I've no idea how long it went on, but the end came suddenly: people were beginning to notice how much time he spent with me, and, if I wasn't going to marry him, I couldn't risk a scandal. One day I said that I should always wish to be his devoted friend, but that he mustn't come to see me again until I invited him; I told the servants that I shouldn't be at home to Lord Brentwood; when he wrote, I ignored his letters. . . .

I don't know how long his passion took to die; it may not be dead yet. When I came out of mourning, I met him at parties; but there were always other people present, and he never tried to reopen the discussion. I've never regretted not marrying him, even when the coalition was formed and he could have had a seat in the cabinet; by that time he'd gone out with the Yeomanry and refused to give up his commission; I wondered for a time whether he was being melodramatic and abandoning politics on my account, but I think—apart from this one middle-aged infatuation—he was too essentially cautious, and, if he ever hoped to be killed, it would be to escape Kathleen rather than the memory of me. I'm prepared to believe that he's almost forgotten my existence. When we met after the war—in Paris and then in London—, well, it was quite easy to meet. . . .

And I should have almost forgotten him, if he hadn't set up an extraordinary craving—not for flattery, not for admiration or love, but simply for being wanted. I was resolved not to marry again, but I yearned to have men in love with me. And it wasn't difficult, for there was a concerted effort on everybody's part to be kind to me; I was "poor Marion Shelley" now, rather than "dear

Marion. ". . . I looked wistful and appealing in black or grey; and by giving up potatoes I made myself just a shade thinner than I ought to have been, so that idiots like Margaret Poynter talked about my "big, sad eyes." . . .

As it became an article of faith that no one could ever again reach my heart, any number of men tried—when they had nothing better to do. I never let them rise to George's pitch of infatuation, however much it might have amused me, because I didn't want the reputation of spurring men to propose and then refusing them; that would hardly have accorded with my wistful, other-world make-up. But I received enormous attention and a sort of sentimental devotion from old and young.

Especially the young. I can't tell you how many boys came to me in those days for advice and help; boys that I shouldn't have thought could possibly have heard of me. They brought me their manuscripts and poured out their troubles. . . . I was really of great service to some of them; and, though I sometimes told myself that I was wasting time and energy on work that would never be better than second-rate, I had quite an affection for the boys themselves. Naturally enough: I was thirty-two when Martin died, thirty-nine when the war broke out; and, though I was quite unconscious that I was growing older, though I was entirely unchanged in looks, I suppose I was beginning to feel quite motherly towards children of eighteen and twenty. . . . They wrote to me from all parts of England, whether they knew me or not, saying they'd heard of me from some one I'd befriended and could I *possibly* spare time to see them if they called the next time they were in London?

One day shortly before the war I had the usual letter, in an unknown hand from an unknown address; and I can't describe the shock I felt when I read the signature "Spenser Woodrow." I'd not seen him since he was a child. . . .

I wrote back most warmly to say I should be *delighted* to see him any time he was in London. . . .

5

He came almost before I'd begun to ask myself why he could possibly want to see me; and I shall never forget my shock when the parlour-maid threw open the drawing-room door one afternoon in the early summer of 1914 and announced: "Mr. Spenser Woodrow."

First the *name*, you know; and then the boy himself, so like his father in face, build, colouring, walk. . . . I knew he could be hardly more than about thirteen; but he looked at least three years older, a delightful school-boy, with his hair brushed back very smoothly from his forehead, trousers very carefully creased and turned up to shew a pair of vivid socks. His voice had almost finished breaking, though it occasionally played tricks with him if he became excited; and he seemed to have missed the pimply, bony-wristed age altogether.

I felt he must be *my* Spenser's younger brother . . . or Spenser himself at a time before I knew him; and yet I felt that I'd always known him, that we'd been children together; and, as I'd always considered myself a *little* older, a *little* more experienced than my Spenser, so now I was just a *little* older than this boy. But only a few years; I was the elder sister; and I felt a thrill right through my body when I called him 'Spenser.' . . .

He was bringing me some letters written by father when *his* father was working on the Restoration pamphlets. Mrs. Woodrow was giving up her house in Oxford and had come across them in turning out old papers; she felt that the family ought to have them in case there was ever a question of publishing father's life. I glanced at one or two My dear Ada, how they brought back the old days! For the most part they were very dry and technical, but there were names and references that carried me to a forgotten world where half the people were now dead! On *this* point Spenser would do well to consult Brander-Wilson of Queen's, who had been specializing on the subject for years; on *that* he must be prepared for a long fight with Jakes of Merton, who refused to accept the orthodox view. . . . Jakes was dead, I know;

Brander-Wilson had gone to America, and I *believe* he was dead; and father, though his neat, vigorous handwriting made him seem extraordinarily alive . . . I had to read on, in the hopes of finding something more personal; Spenser had evidently written of some invitation. . . . And then I almost stopped breathing, for father was inviting him to Hillcrest. "*If you're at a loose end for the week before you go abroad, why not come here? I don't know whether you're a dancing man, but I hear rumours of a party for the Infirmary Ball; my wife is a patroness, so we have to support it, but you can please yourself whether you go or not.*" . . .

The Infirmary Ball! Where we fell in love! The ball I didn't want to go to. . . . If we *had* married, however poor we might have been . . . I knew *now*, when it was too late, that we should have made a success of it; I was wrong in thinking that, when passion was burnt out, we should have had nothing left; we should have had *children* in common, this boy. . . . And he would have been so important that I shouldn't have minded the narrowness of Oxford. Hadn't I seen Joan in her poky little Avenue Road house—radiant? And Grace in FitzJohn's Avenue? And you in Regent's Park? Oh, the awful realization that Spenser and all of you had been right and that I'd been wrong!

It wasn't pique, it was a frightful sense of waste: what had I *got*? Father's writing seemed to reproach me. . . . I'd run away from Hillcrest and sacrificed father, I'd sacrificed the man I loved and the children I ought to have borne him—for *what*? For ambition? Yes, and I'd attained my ambition; that had always been my answer hitherto, but now I saw that I'd sacrificed everything for a success that wasn't worth having. . . .

I put the letters aside and began to question this boy about himself. All the years since his father's death they'd been living in the tiny house two miles out of Oxford where I'd visited them; for all that time Julia had been working on the *Encyclopædia*, but that was now over. By extraordinary luck—from the fact that they considered it luck I could guess how terribly poor they

must be—Mrs. Woodrow had been offered a position as secretary-housekeeper to some archæologist in Herefordshire who had *most* kindly promised to allow the boy to live there during the holidays. Spenser was at Stonehouse, where he'd won a scholarship. I asked what he was going to do after that, but they hadn't decided; it depended on whether he won a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge, they weren't even certain whether he could afford to stay on at school. . . .

Julia must have made a wonderfully brave fight, but I didn't admire her, I didn't care how she slaved or struggled, I was utterly indifferent to her. But not to Spenser's boy: I was shocked to think of him at a second-rate school—and not certain whether he could buy clothes and books to remain there—, with nothing to look forward to. I began to think whether I couldn't interest some one in him. It wasn't simply because I'd loved his father; the boy was so attractive in himself, with the steady grey eyes I'd always adored in Spenser and the clean-cut, Red Indian features; he had beautiful manners and was perfectly at ease, a thoroughly normal, charming boy, telling me all about Stonehouse and making me drag out of him that he had once been tried for the school second eleven, but that that was only because every one else was ill, and he was no use *really*. . . . I felt he'd win any one's heart; and if I could say that he had intelligence as well as good looks . . .

I thought of the Poynters, rolling in money and with no children of their own; Margaret Poynter thought children beneath her and would have had a fit if I'd suggested that she should adopt this boy, but as an act of charity, or if I could make her think that he was a mute, inglorious Milton waiting for some one to give him his chance in life and that she would have all the credit for it. . . .

I tried to find whether my young *protégé* had anything behind the good looks. He was so young that I didn't expect anything wonderful, and I had no idea how much boys of that age are supposed to know; but he was certainly intelligent, and I gathered that he was a year and

a half younger than the average of his form. It was enough to justify me in approaching Margaret; and, if once she took to him, he was a made man: school, university—and then Lord Poynter would have to find him some good job. . . . I nearly carried the boy off then and there to see them.

If only I had!

I've despised Margaret Poynter, I've pitied her, but I've never liked her; and I began to wonder whether I could *bear* to entrust her with this. If she refused—I didn't care whether she refused or not; there were others—, she would never lose an opportunity of explaining and apologizing; if she agreed, poor little Spenser would become such a bore on her lips: he'd be her new great interest, she'd want to tell me how he was getting on and how terribly clever she and Max had been in having a tutor for him last holidays or deciding to make him read mathematics because he had a *real* taste for that. . . . Margaret is always obvious at the top of her voice! And, if he *did* do well, she would be so important and conceited. *Her* discovery, *her* influence. . .

If any hitch occurred, she'd blame *me*. Not in words! Thank you, I have tamed Lady Poynter! But she'd make mischief and say I'd behaved badly in *imposing* Spenser upon her; and why had I done it? Who *were* the Woodrows? And sooner or later she'd unearth some one from North Oxford who'd say: "Oh, Marion Shelley was in love with the boy's father; for all I know, it's *her* child." . . . Don't grimace, Ada, you idiot; that's what *would* have been said.

It dawned on me that I *couldn't* leave this poor boy at Margaret Poynter's mercy. And then, with the passing vivid vagueness that you experience when you're trying to recollect a dream, I realized that he was too precious for me to hand over to the first rich woman in the street. Spenser's *son*! If any one was to take care of him, surely I was the proper person?

I wondered why I hadn't seen it before; I wondered if I could afford it. . . .

6

I had over a thousand a year of my own money ; and Martin's royalties in addition. *They* would gradually diminish, of course, but I had still two of the "early novels" not yet published, which—with England and America—would keep me in funds for some time ; I calculated to make a thousand on the four-and-sixpenny sales of any book in this country and another five hundred in America, where Martin wasn't nearly so popular, and then there were cheap editions that I really couldn't estimate. Sometimes I'd told myself that I must take in sail when my last book was published, but that was a long way ahead and didn't bother me now ; all I saw was that I could spare a substantial sum for five, six, seven years. I thought of Spenser's face when I explained . . . but, of course, he wouldn't understand yet ; I thought of him when he *was* old enough to understand, to see all I'd done for him, to love me for it. Until that day I don't think I'd ever wanted to *serve* any one, even as cheaply and basely as I was serving little Spenser—for the gratitude and love that I should buy ; it was—well, you must have had the feeling with your children, the glorious abandonment of giving, the self-annihilation and the heady sense that I should have some one looking up to me, loving me, depending on me. *You* know it ! Yes, but, Ada, have you enough detachment to throw your mind back to the days when you *didn't* know it, when it was born in you with your first child ? Do you remember when your first child, separated at birth, came back and hid his face on your breast when he needed protection ?

I was happy then. . . . *Surely ?*

And I'd fancied, even for a moment, that I could surrender that privilege to Margaret Poynter !

I wouldn't surrender it to *any one*, no woman *could* ! . . . And then I remembered, with a cold, empty sinking of the heart, that this boy had a mother who would try to establish *her* claim on him ; and I felt, growing within me like some agonizing, hot tumour on my brain, a hatred of Julia Woodrow. My first hatred ! I've despised people,

disliked people, envied people, even, till I'd beaten them ; but I'd never been disposed to say of any other woman : " The world isn't big enough for us both." And, so long as Spenser was there, she and I could have no peace ; one must yield. I made up my mind to crush her, crush her with kindness—and to steal Spenser. . . .

He was due back in Oxford that evening, but I made him telegraph to say that he was staying the night with me ; and I wrote to ask his mother if she would come and see me at once. I had proposals to make, I said, which would have an important bearing on Spenser's life ; and I'd taken the great liberty of keeping him with me until we could all discuss the subject together. No, I rewrote the letter, leaving out the " great liberty " ; from what I'd seen of Julia I felt that high-handedness would pay with her. . . . Then I gave him dinner and sent my maid to buy him pyjamas and took him to a theatre ; and I went in to say good-night, and, before he knew what he was doing, he was sitting up in bed, kissing me and thanking me for all my kindness—which I hadn't expected in a boy of that age. When I kissed *him* . . . For a moment I thought I was kissing *my* Spenser ; and bitterness, death, a dozen years, disillusionment had made no difference. Then I saw that such a fancy was absurd ; but, when he kissed me again, I felt that I'd withdrawn him the first inch from his mother's arms. . . .

She came up in time for lunch next day ; and, after one glance, I felt that I had an easy task. Superficially, of course, she was bewildered and a shade antagonistic ; but, when that passed off and I had time to study her, I divined the marks of the irons on her wrists and ankles ; you can't do menial work for ten years, under people who can starve you into submission, without becoming spiritless ; Julia Woodrow's first question was always " Can I *afford* . . . ?" until she must sometimes have asked herself whether she could afford to call her soul her own A lady, the daughter of a Leamington doctor, humbling herself for ten years by hunting up references and keeping a card-index ; losing her livelihood when the work was over and thankful to answer letters and write *menu-*

cards for an old bachelor who thought he was courteous in saying "*Sometimes*, Mrs. Woodrow, when we have a little party, perhaps you will honour us with your company . . .", meaning that every other night, when there was a woman too many, she'd be hunted into her room with a plate of luke-warm scraps. . . . That and a hundred a year between her and destitution. It doesn't tend to keep up your self-respect; and she'd starved herself until she couldn't eat a proper meal; and she knew her clothes weren't as good as mine. . . .

It was laughable to think that, the day before, I'd been saying: "The world isn't big enough for us both"; in a different way I'd uttered the same threat against Margaret Poynter when I first launched my campaign in London; and I'd found that I was bringing up a *soixante-quinze* against a card-house. Poor Julia Woodrow was like the Red Queen: you had to bind up her finger before it was pricked. I won't say that *then*, seeing how I'd prospered while she bent before the storm, I didn't feel for just a moment that I'd been wise in not marrying Spenser. . . .

I sent the boy to amuse himself in the library and laid my proposals before the mother.

"It was most kind of you to send me those letters of my dear father's," I said. "I wrote to the Clarendon Press last night to ask if they would consider a short 'life.' . . . And now I'm going to be very direct with you; and, if you've read the letters, you'll forgive me, I'm sure, on account of the old friendship between your husband and our family. I had a long talk with Spenser yesterday and I was sorry to gather that you were even less well-off than I'd imagined." She flushed a little and tried to interrupt, but I wouldn't let her speak; and from that moment I knew I could do what I liked with her. "I've not had a particularly *easy* life," I said, "but my wants are few, and I feel—as I'm sure you do—that it's harder to see other people in any kind of distress than to experience distress oneself. We've reached an age," I said, "when we don't expect very much of fate and when we've already had all the opportunities that

are likely to come our way ; it's a different thing altogether with some one who's still young enough to be made or marred by the opportunities he receives. I'm sure you'd like to see Spenser being given the best possible chance ; and, as an old friend of his father's, I should like to see it too."

There I paused. . . Just as when I called on her after Spenser's funeral, I wanted her to have an opportunity of shewing me what he had told her about me or if he'd told her anything. It didn't *matter* ; I hadn't married him, and she had ; but . . . I just wanted to know. *Probably* he'd never mentioned my name ; you see, even if he thought I'd behaved very badly to him—which he *didn't*, I'm sure ; he wasn't clever enough—, he couldn't denounce me without giving away the truth, which was that he'd thrown himself into her arms in the hope that she'd make a fuss of him and help him to forget me. I don't suppose he ever mentioned me ; when I congratulated him on his engagement, I expect he said : " Oh, she's a daughter of Professor Tenby ; I used to see a certain amount of the family ". . . . But I wanted to make sure. . . .

Julia didn't help me. She just said :

" That's very kind of you."

Like a broken-spirited parlour-maid of the old days when you offered to drive her to church.

" Well," I said, " I'm not a rich woman, but I've enough for my needs and a trifle over. My sisters are comfortably married. I've no one dependent on me and, to put the thing in a nut-shell, I want to know if you'll let me help you. Education is so vitally important to a boy that I should feel I'd done some good in the world if I could assure that for Spenser. With your approval, I should like to make myself responsible for him at school and, perhaps, at Oxford or Cambridge, if he goes there. Tell me that I may do this."

She tried and, of course, broke down ; some people can't express ordinary gratitude without a scene. . . I needn't tell you that, as soon as she could speak, she accepted my offer. For a time we talked about the future : I wanted to send the boy to Winchester or Eton, where

he'd make friends with the people who would be useful to him in after-life, but, on consideration, we thought it better not to uproot him from Stonehouse, where, apparently, he was doing very well; and I felt that, if I sent him to the right college afterwards, he would gravitate naturally to the people I wanted him to know, especially if I took some trouble with him during the vacations and introduced him to the parents.

We had him in from the library and explained what we'd arranged. Then, to "celebrate the occasion," as I told him, and to win him over *heart and soul*, as I told myself, I insisted they should both spend the night with me and that he should choose where we should dine and what we should go to see. . . .

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

The evening that I set myself to steal Spencer from his mother. . . Though I daresay he was grateful enough to her, he had his strain of selfishness, like every one else, and I worked on that ; like every one else, too, he was hurt and humiliated by not being able to afford the things that all other boys afforded. I could give him everything that he'd thought of in his wildest dreams. . . . I can't tell you anything about what we did that night ; I was too busy with my own thoughts. . . .

The boy was half mine already, soon he would belong to me : and, if I was deliberately playing on his selfishness, I imagined somehow that I should be able to set that right afterwards. Anyway, it was all for his material good : I would prepare a life of long triumph for him and share in it myself ; all my energy, all my ambition and experience would be projected into him, he should do all that I'd done and all that I could never hope to do. I was glad now that I'd consented to leave him at Stonehouse ; to start from what was nothing better than a grammar-school would make his success all the greater. I pictured him at Oxford, getting at once into the best set ; in the vacations—when I'd allowed him to spend a week with his mother to keep her good-humoured—he should come abroad with me to learn languages, to pick up just that cosmopolitan quality which English public men so conspicuously lack, to see that the aristocracy in England is only a branch of something European. . . . I would coach him in country-house life and take him with me to the big houses until he went there

as much of *right* as if he'd been born in one of them. I'd done it for myself—as a married woman with an uncertain husband—, I was accepted; I would get him accepted; and, when the time came, I would make a career for him and find him a wife. . . . You can't be surprised if I didn't spare much attention for the play.

On a smaller scale you must have dreamed these dreams, Ada, for your own children. I've heard you! But *your* plans were evolved gradually, day by day, from a time when your babies were so young that you couldn't really know *what* was to be made of them; *mine* came to me fully grown, like Spenser himself! I could plot and contrive for him as though Max Poynter, say, had given me a million pounds and told me to spend it how I liked. . . . I was on fire to talk everything over with *him*.

Julia I sent back to Oxford next day; she was busy moving, and I had no further need of her. Spenser thought he should go too, but I asked whether he wouldn't enjoy a few days more with me. *A few days*, not one! And I said it in front of his mother, who'd already told him he was to come—on the plea that he'd wear me out; and of course he said he'd prefer to stay. I asked Julia if she had the *heart* to disappoint him, and of course she gave way; when we said good-bye, she was effusively grateful again, but I fancied she was more bewildered than ever. Perhaps in her inmost soul she was beginning to fear that some day I might steal her son from her; I—I knew I'd stolen him *already*!

And every day I tied him to me more securely. We talked and planned, I bought him things and gave him pocket-money to buy things for himself; he was in heaven, and every word I spoke opened a vista of new heavens. At night I sat on the edge of his bed, with my arms round him, whispering a few of the dreams I'd been dreaming for him; after being brought up for so long by his mother, he had a soft strain in him that I should think is unusual in boys of that age, he didn't mind being caressed. And on the last day he begged me to come and see him at Stonehouse: I was "so pretty," I wore "such stunning clothes", I should "make the other chaps' mothers sit

up". . . . The "other chaps' *mothers*"! It was well poor Julia wasn't present! I used to see his big grey eyes lighting up with a dark fire of excitement until I had to stroke his head and calm him. And, bone for bone, it was *my* Spenser's head . . . and I thought I'd forgotten, since the night—that one night we were together—, when he kissed me in the hall at Hillcrest and I drew his head down to my bosom. . . .

I felt so different that I wondered when other people would begin to notice a difference. There was no question now of having failed, of being left out, of missing something and being excluded from the freemasonry of all women who'd borne children. I put it to the test by going—without any explanation—to call on the people I'd been secretly envying for so long. Oh, doesn't it sound absurd? But it shews you how this old wound had festered. . . . Grace: I called on Grace and had a look at her Peter and John; and at those ugly spectacled creatures of Joan's; and at Winnie Ashwin's three wistful, neurotic little brats. Nothing to fear from comparison with them! The only child I *would* have accepted for my own was Mildred Burnley's Virginia, who was quite lovely; but she was only a girl. I had my son, my grown son, without suffering anything to get him. The sordid years with Martin, my eternal plotting and arranging—I forgot all that when Spenser came to me. And soon people *did* notice a difference; they couldn't understand what had overtaken me and changed my life. I seemed so much younger and happier that they decided I *must* have fallen in love.

I had certainly fallen in love with life, with happiness; my standards of what mattered all changed; and, though I lived the same outward life as before, it was my body that lived it, giving parties and attending committees and talking to publishers; my soul had a secret life of its own. If you had seen my letters to Spenser, if you had seen me waiting for his, you'd have said I was a love-sick girl; no girl was more jealous than I was when he went home to his mother and I could imagine her trying to win him back; no girl tried harder to please him when

he came to me. I made myself beautiful for him : not in clothes only but in myself. . . .

You didn't know that could be done ? That's because you have no faith, you've never tried. I was always pretty, always well-dressed, though in old days I would sooner have been judged on my brains than on my looks ; now I said that I would be so transfigured by my happiness that my mere prettiness should turn to radiant beauty. You still don't think that possible ? Well, Arkwright painted me that summer, and you've seen his picture, with me standing beside it ; did you fail to see the radiance and the beauty there ? My dear Ada, you couldn't take your eyes off it except when you turned to stare open-mouthed at me ! Go back and look at it again ! *I've* changed since then ; ah, yes, but the picture hasn't, and the beauty you still see there you also saw in me during the days when I had resolved to be beautiful for Spenser's sake ; that is the picture of my soul's secret life.

My *only* true life at that time. . . . I sometimes wondered whether people found me strangely absent-minded, whether I went everywhere with an idiot smile of happiness, whether I ever broke into impatience at the irrelevancy of everything that hadn't to do with my boy. I didn't dare speak about him to any one, because I wouldn't share my secret ; and, also, I was afraid that I should never stop and that people would whisper and laugh about my infatuation. How it became known I've never discovered, but there are few secrets in London ; I soon found that everybody knew I'd taken charge of some young boy and was paying for his education. They all said : "*How* like dear Marion ! She *really* is a saint ! " And, when they heard of my going to Stonehouse, they said I was *too* marvellous and, whatever I did, I did so *thoroughly*. . . .

That, I suppose, was the last of my false reputations : first I was the gentle, unassertive woman who never paraded her knowledge or thrust herself forward—I, the most ruthless, domineering woman in England !— ; then I was the angel who had struggled so long with Martin's

evil genius ; then the heart-broken widow who had loved and stood by him throughout his degradation and refused to marry again ; and now . . . I didn't mind what they said so long as they left me *alone* ; that was my test of good and bad—whether a thing interfered with Spenser and me. . . .

As I'll shew you. . . At the end of the summer term I borrowed a car from Margaret Poynter and went to Stonehouse for Speech-Day ; I remember nothing of the drive, but, once there, I couldn't forget anything if I tried—the titles of Spenser's prizes and the name of the second master who left that term and was given a presentation ; I could draw him, if I had a pencil. . . . We motored from Stonehouse to a village ten miles from Ross, where Julia Woodrow was working ; and I feel I could find my way there again blindfold, there's not a word of Spenser's, not a meal we ate that I could forget. We stayed a week in Herefordshire and then motored back to London. The next morning I went into Spenser's room to ask how he'd slept, and he wanted to know whether war had been declared. . . .

War ? . . .

Then I remembered that for weeks I'd been seeing headlines and leading articles about "grave situations" and "war imminent" ; I'd ignored them, I who was usually better informed than any three embassies put together ! It was trivial and no affair of ours. . . .

"War declared ?" I repeated. "Oh yes ! I think it has been."

"*Now* the Germans are in for a licking," said Spenser.

Afterwards, when people talked of the war as a death-grapple between two rival civilizations, I nodded and speculated with them how long it would go on, but that was how the war came to *me* : it was an irrelevancy that couldn't possibly affect our lives except in so far as I doubted whether I could take Spenser to Venice in September. But I would make the Lorings ask us to House of Steynes instead, and my boy should have his first experience of the big country-houses. . . .

2

Later, the war was forced on my notice because people wouldn't talk of anything else ; and Spenser, like every boy of that age, caught the fever badly. Even then my interest was artificial : how, I asked myself, does this affect the two of us ? All the young men were applying for commissions, but Spenser was only fourteen ; he asked whether he might join the corps next term at Stonehouse, and I said " yes "—I was so happy when he asked me for things !— ; he'd wanted to join before, but his mother couldn't afford the uniform. But those were the days when we expected the end to come before Christmas. . . .

Then, you remember, we were told to prepare for a three years' war. Every one looked very grave ; the young men who hadn't already gone felt that they mustn't wait any longer ; the girls bustled off to learn a little about nursing ; mere children like Virginia Burnley and Joan's Ursula began to cut bandages and knit comforters ; and I . . . I only said to myself : " Fourteen and a half, fifteen and a half, sixteen and a half ; they'll never dare to accept boys under seventeen, so *we're* safe." And then I tried to dismiss the war.

Spenser recalled me to it very unpleasantly one day towards the end of the holidays by asking whether he couldn't go into the navy. We were in Scotland—*not* at House of Steynes, which had been turned into a hospital ; I became so irritated by people who *would* thrust this irrelevant war down my throat and upset my plans !—staying with the Knightriders we were, and all the north-east coast was alive with excitement about the fleet. It seemed natural enough for a boy to want to be a sailor, and I didn't regard the proposal seriously until I found how carefully Spenser had worked out everything about age and training and the like ; then I had a shock, for—in that mood—he was quite equal to modelling himself on boys in books and running away to sea. Great diplomacy was needed, so I talked to him very sympathetically and pointed out that, since the war was

bound to be over before he was fit to join his first ship, he would be committing himself to a very hopeless, dreary life.

"If you were a few years older," I said, "it would be different: you could have entered the navy in time to take part in this war, which of course is what every one now in the service has been training for. You've missed that, unfortunately for you; and, after this war, it's impossible to think there'll be another, for many years there won't be any other navy for you to fight, and you'll waste your life preparing for something that can never happen."

I'm glad to say that in time I convinced him and restored my own peace of mind. It was not for long, however, as my unfortunate phrase about "a few years older" was haunting him: he asked me if I thought the military age would be lowered, and was delighted one day when Kathleen Knightrider thought him older than he was. I fancy that, when the first wounded cases came back to England, the war lost a good deal of its romance in the eyes of people who had regarded it as a great new game or had only seen troops parading in peace-time, with bands playing; and it became very unromantic indeed during that first winter when every one lived to his waist in water. . . . I was at pains that Spenser should understand what it was that he was so anxious to join in, though I didn't want to make a coward of him.

Alas! it was not patriotism that inspired him: he hated the Germans and admired the French, because that was the fashion; but all he knew about the war was what the *Daily Mail* told him; and, if it had been a game of tennis and you'd changed partners after the first year, he'd have admired the Germans and hated the French just as readily. In other words, he didn't care what the war was about so long as there was a war of some kind.

I remember trying to laugh him out of this and telling him that he was a bloodthirsty young savage. He assured me that, while he longed to fight, he couldn't bear the idea of killing any one; and then I began to see what

I ought to have seen before. He was the son of his father, with that craving for action which wouldn't let my Spenser sit idle at the Infirmary Ball when other people were dancing, that exulting love of adventure which sent him off to climb mountains whenever he could scrape together money for a ticket to Switzerland. My boy was already big for his age, he was going to have all his father's strength and endurance; and I now saw that he'd inherited his father's restless passion for risking his neck. A cloud came down on my happiness—something cold, dark, oppressive; until the war was over I knew that I should never be at ease, perhaps I should never be at ease again.

When we returned from Scotland and Spenser went back to school, I felt that I must do some work for the war. In those days, you remember, entertaining came to an end, quite literally; you might ask people to your house, if you wanted to talk business with them, and you gave them two courses and claret or whisky-and-soda. In the social sense, I'd abruptly ceased to exist; and, though that didn't matter in the holidays when I had Spenser, old habits of mind count for so much that I couldn't reconcile myself to this extinction. I've told you that, when people became preoccupied with a general election, I turned political hostess to keep myself in the running; now, when everybody was organizing, I turned organizer: before the first shot was fired, Margaret Poynter had rented a vast house in Chester Gardens and turned it into a hospital; as any one might have foreseen, she very quickly came to grief, and there would have been trouble with the War Office and, perhaps, a scandal, if some one competent hadn't taken it over; I went in as commandant and took charge until the armistice. I daresay I did useful work—I don't know and I don't care—; certainly I was very busy; but this, again, wasn't my real life: I lived that in the holidays, when Spenser came home for his *exeat*, when I read his letters, whenever I saw him growing under my hand. . . .

Fourteen, fifteen. . .

I never imagined I could be thrilled to the *marrow* when a boy was given "lag&remove" into the Under

Sixth. . . . And can *you* see me standing on a plank in a sea of mud and screaming "Well played, Stonehouse!" whenever Spenser raced down the field with the ball? Can you imagine me patiently learning about "corners" and "penalties" and "dribbling" and "off-side"? I *did*. . . . And one day, after the Tiversley match, the captain muttered something as they came off the field, and Spenser rushed up to me with shining eyes to say that he'd been told to get his cap. . . . Nothing in all my life seemed to matter as much as that! He was only fifteen and eleven months. . . .

You think I regarded him as a baby, in reckoning his age like that? I assure you it was the exact contrary! He was growing so terribly old that I had to cling on to every day that kept him younger than the morrow. Fourteen and a half, fifteen, fifteen and a half, sixteen . . . and still no slightest indication when the war was likely to end! As soon as conscription came in, eighteen was fixed as the lowest age for service: and Spenser would be that in 1919! *Would* the war be over by then? If you remember our failure in 1916 and then the Russian collapse and the uncertainty about the time that America would take to get ready! I saw my boy being dragged nearer and nearer to the precipice; and he was marking off the days . . . just as I marked them off, but I was praying blindly that somehow every remaining day would be twice as long, with four times as much fighting! I didn't care *how* many were killed, *who* won . . . so long as it *ended*!

And Spenser was calling himself the "1919 class" and wondering when he was going to be called up! Those were the days when I joined Connie Maitland's committee and went with a deputation to insist that all fit men should be "combed out" of offices and factories; you remember that every one who'd been rejected or discharged was to be reexamined to see whether he was fit for service; I made speeches and wrote letters, I pretended that it was a shame to leave hale young shirks at home while wounded men and boys were sent out, I urged that the age-limit should be raised and that married and single should be

treated alike, I talked about the "reservoirs of manpower" in Ireland and said that we were betraying the French. . . .

If any one paid any attention, I must have done a lot of harm. . . .

And I knew . . . and didn't care. Wounded, married men, "indispensables", "silver-badge men", fit, unfit—what were they to me? Should I have minded if Paris had fallen a dozen times? It was Spenser I was thinking of. . . Spenser who seemed a year older every time we met; overripe for *slaughtering*. . . .

He came up to see me specially . . . in the March offensive . . . when it seemed as if Paris or the Channel ports *had* to go. I thought that by now I knew every intonation and mood, but there was something stiff and unamiable in his manner that was new to me . . . and frightening. The soft streak had altogether disappeared.

"Well, darling," he began, "I've come to have a talk." . . .

He couldn't call me "Mrs. Shelley," and "Marion" didn't come naturally to him, so I was always "darling".

"What's been happening?" I asked.

"I've applied for a commission," he told me. "I'm absolutely qualified after all the time I've had in the corps and I shall get it without any difficulty unless you or mother give me away about my age. You won't do that, will you? It would have been shabby not to tell you after all you've done for me, but I hope you won't turn round and put a spoke in my wheel. . . . I've said I'm nineteen. . . I couldn't wait: it's too serious with the Germans pouring down on Paris. We want every man we can raise."

I prayed for strength to be composed . . . and still diplomatic! First of all I complimented him on his spirit, then I hinted that perhaps he'd taken things into his own hands just a *little* too much. . . .

"You won't remember it, but there was such a dreadful muddle at the beginning of the war," I explained, "that the government couldn't trust people's private judgement any longer. Conscription *had* to be imposed so that the

government could say who should go and who should remain behind ; before that, you had old men and young boys who knocked up at once and were more hindrance than help." . . .

For all my diplomacy Spenser saw where I was leading him.

" I shan't knock up," he said.

" I hope not," I answered, " but, now that the age limit is fixed and the government can call you up when you're wanted, you're really impeding the machine by coming forward too soon ; it's mistaken patriotism. I know men who've got round the doctor somehow and have simply been more trouble than they were worth ; so with any one who runs counter to what is, after all, a considered and very elaborate system."

Spenser wouldn't argue ; he just tried to soften me with a smile.

" Well, *you* won't split on me, will you, darling ? " he begged.

" If you try to pass yourself off with a false age——," I began.

" If you do," Spenser interrupted, " I shall take a false name as well and enlist as a private. It has to be one thing or the other."

" *One thing or the other* " ! The words his father had used when I tried to make him postpone our engagement ! I knew now why I found something stiff and unamiable in his manner : he had inherited it. . . . And I knew that, if I opposed him, I should lose him as I'd lost his father.

" Spenser dear," I said, " I'm only trying to think what's best ! I don't know what I've done that you should threaten me ! " . . .

3

The weeks before Spenser went out were like the last hours in a condemned cell. . . . The time raced by, he was too busy in camp to write much, and I hardly saw

him till his last leave. *That*, of course, he had to spend *mostly* with his mother; and I could have killed her for coming between us!

As I couldn't kill her, I took the meanest revenge that ever a jealous woman devised: when Spenser had to give the name and address of his next-of-kin, I made him give mine; I said that, if he were wounded, I could break the shock to his poor mother; and he believed me and thanked me. . . . Break the shock! He was mine, and I wasn't going to have another woman coming between us and telling me at her leisure! If he were wounded, *I* was the one to take care of him; I would fight for him against her, against every one!

And I had to fight. There was a great change in Spenser when he came to say good-bye: hitherto he'd been a school-boy, keeping terms and obeying rules with other school-boys, obeying me quite as unquestioningly when he came to Chelsea for the holidays; now he was a man—independent, with money of his own, with brother-officers who expected him to go everywhere and do everything in a crowd, with mysterious, very common little girls who had sprung up like mushrooms and were as familiar with him as if they'd known him all their lives. Miss "Dot" Fairclough was one, and Miss "Rene" Barling another; where he discovered them I really dared not enquire. . . .

He spared me one evening, and I tried to make it a *heaven* for him, as in the old days. . . . But I believe he was bored at being alone with me; and the rest of the time he'd always "promised a man to lunch at the Piccadilly Grill," "promised a man to dine and go to a show". I tried to make him take care of his health, for he was wearing himself out; but he would only say that he "must have one good last fling." . . . And in this recklessness I saw that, unconsciously, he was feeling that perhaps he never *would* come back; and, as though I'd never dreaded it before, this seemed to stop my heart with quite a new dread. After that I told myself that I mustn't *think* of breaking down until he'd gone; and, if he enjoyed racketing about with these young officers and

common girls that they had such a genius for discovering, I must actually encourage him. . . .

We aren't very often confronted with reality in this life of ours. . . . Looking back over it all, I feel that my passion for *my* Spenser was real; and my love, genuine in all its selfishness, for this boy—that was real; and my blank fear and horror when he went out—that was all real. . . . So real that I felt I'd met something conceived on superhuman lines, something I couldn't cope with, something that made me want to rush to a god and get him to help. You remember Turner's picture of Ulysses defying Polyphemus? That's the sort of thing I mean: a small, clear figure in the foreground and, up in the clouds, a vast suggestion of vague, overwhelming power and ruthless cruelty. If any one had given me a god that I could have believed in . . .

When I'd seen Spenser in his great-coat and muffler, seen him for the last time, I went quite mad. I ought to have been at my hospital, of course, but I couldn't face meeting people, I couldn't concentrate my thoughts or take decisions; instead, I wandered about the streets like a lost soul. . . . I've no idea where I went that day, though you may be surprised to learn that I spent some part of it with a clairvoyant; and to this day I've no idea how I'd ever heard of her or how I found my way there; even now I don't know what her name was. She told me that I was going to lose some one very dear to me; and we had a hideous scene because, of all ridiculous things, I thought it was such bad taste for her to tell me that, to insist on it when I knew it already! It was like dragging up some discreditable secret against me, and I wanted to say "All right, I *admit* it; don't rub it in!" What I actually said I don't know, but we both became very angry. . . .

When I reached home I'd fully made up my mind that I should never see Spenser again; my life was over: something too big to control, that vague, vast Polyphemus figure had decided it, and, as I wasn't in the mood to commit suicide, the problem was to find something which would enable me to forget. . . . I went to my office at the

hospital about midnight ; I read the reports and wrote, wrote, wrote till morning ; I went home, came back, home, back, day after day, living on champagne and dry bread . . . and finding that the agony only grew worse with every hour. . . .

And then I had a long letter from Spenser !

In the best of spirits, full of excitement, not suggesting that it was even possible for him to be killed. . . . That steadied me, and I told myself that he was no more likely to be killed than any one else. I wrote to him, wrote daily, sending him papers, cigarettes, food ; we can adjust ourselves to *almost* everything, and I adjusted myself to this so well that, by exhausting every ounce of surplus energy, I became used to the war and ceased to think ; even when I knew that he might be in action any day, I remained calm and told myself that he would come through unhurt.

When the Germans had been thrown back at the Marne, he began to talk about leave ; in the summer, when the worst of the fighting seemed over, he came to London as the most natural thing in the world and not in the least as though he'd escaped from a hail-storm of death. He proposed to treat himself to a thoroughly good time and only suggested, as a matter of duty, that I should invite his mother to come and stay with us.

When I saw Spenser that day, thin, dirty, unshaven and so wonderfully alive, *smiling*, I understood something of the grip and power of early Christianity. "The only son of his mother, and she a widow." . . . Whether it happened or not didn't matter ; but, if you could make people—women who knew the long agony of bearing children, widows who'd borne their one child and couldn't hope for more if anything happened to him—, if you could make them believe in such a miracle as that their sole child could be raised from the dead, you could do anything with them ! I, who'd never known a bodily pang, I knew how that woman felt ! And the miracle itself is nothing to the miracle of seeing it happen. . . . I went to pieces—utterly—and only pulled myself together when Spenser grew uncomfortable at seeing me cry.

I'd hoped to have him to myself for one night, as Julia couldn't get up to London till next morning; but he had so few days and he *did* want to cram all he could into them. A dance! We improvised it in half-an-hour! *He* telephoned to his friends—he'd written days beforehand to about half-a-dozen girls, telling them to keep that night free—, *I* ordered food and found a woman to come and play; we cleared the furniture out of the drawing-room and French-chalked the floor. Then he went off to have a Turkish bath . . . and I threw myself on my bed and finished the cry that he'd interrupted. . . .

The dance itself . . . Well, I only enjoyed it because Spenser was enjoying it; but I was out of tune that night. The men were impossible creatures, I thought: all of a type, flashily smart, devastatingly "all there" and too insolent to say "How-do-you do?" or "Good-bye" to the woman who was, after all, their hostess. And, really, the men were better than the girls! Smoking even when they danced, drinking, talking through their noses—and such penetrating, ill-bred voices! They were all very familiar and *knowing*; you heard one young cub saying to another: "I hope you got home safely—but perhaps that's a thing we don't discuss." "I got home eventually, but I stopped to have a drop of breakfast at the old spot; we *waited* for you." . . . "Ah, I was having words with the male parent, who swore I'd drunk all the bath-water." . . . Odious, I thought them. . . .

I don't think it was jealousy so much as a protective instinct, but I didn't like the way the girls danced, or the way they fell out of their clothes, or anything about them. I hadn't been to a party of that kind, I hadn't met the war-girl; and, when I remembered Spenser's reserve and breeding a few months before, I was shocked to see him joining in with all the rest. The only girls who looked and behaved like ladies were one or two like Virginia Burnley and Leila Ashwin, whom I'd myself invited; and I really didn't know whether to leave them in the cold or to risk introducing these hobbledahoys. I tried to select one or two men who seemed not quite so bad as the others, but they had apparently made their arrangements

for the whole evening ; even Spenser. . . He came up to me and said :

"Now, darling, I must have *one* with you ; we've never danced together."

"But I don't know any of these steps you're doing," I said. "Why don't you ask little Miss Burnley?"

"Because little Miss Burnley looks thoroughly stiff," he answered.

"If you find her strange at first," I said, "it's only because she's a lady."

That took the conceit out of Master Spenser. He asked her quite nicely, and they seemed to be dancing together for most of the evening. And next day he wanted me to arrange another meeting, because he was "rather hard hit, you know." I was glad for him to see that there were other girls beside the Dot Fairclough type, but I told him we wouldn't make any plans until we'd seen what his mother wanted to do.

That wasn't my true reason : I wanted time to become accustomed to the idea of Spenser's being grown-up. . . .

4

Will you understand me when I say that I was so happy to have him back that I didn't mind sharing him with his mother ? Why should I, indeed ? What right had I to mind ? Well, the sense of possession is sometimes so strong that you can't abate the least particle of it for any one ! But, on Spenser's first leave, the idea of possession and rivalry didn't occur to me ; we were so anxious—Julia and I—to make him happy that we combined to efface ourselves.

As, indeed, we had to. Side by side we learnt that he was old enough to fly by himself and to want a life of his own ; already he wasn't telling us everything, and we must expect to be told less. We didn't know, we shall never know his relations with these flashy girls ; he wouldn't dream of telling us, and we couldn't ask him. I realized then for the first time that even without war or sickness a mother's sufferings are not over when her

son is born: there's a worse pang when he grows up. Spenser would come flying downstairs at one o'clock, put his head in at the door and shout that he'd promised to take some one out to lunch, but he'd join us at dinner and would I see about tickets for the Hippodrome? And after the Hippodrome he'd always promised to meet some girl at a dance and would I make *sure* that he didn't oversleep himself next day, as he'd promised to play squash with a man before lunch? Julia was utterly bewildered—and a little bit resentful, I thought; one day she said, in her subdued little voice:

"I should hardly have recognized Spenser."

"Boys mature quickly in a war," I answered.

She thought over this profound truth and then said:

"I wonder if he'll ever—well, grow down again . . . when it's all over. It's so funny to find him ordering waiters about and telling us what we must eat and the best theatre to go to. Taking taxis everywhere as though he were quite rich. . . And so much at his ease with all these girls. . . . It seems only yesterday that he wouldn't go into a shop without me. . . . He's all right, I suppose? These are quite nice girls that he meets? Of course, I should never have been allowed to go about with a man as they do; and I shouldn't have *dared* to wear these indecent dresses."

"I imagine these girls know their value too well ever to lose their heads," I told her.

"Spenser's still so very young," she murmured. "It would be dreadful if he got into the hands of some one who might spoil his life."

"You needn't fear that," I said. "They don't mind having 'a good time' together; but, when these girls marry, they'll look for somebody who can support them on their present scale of extravagance—which none of these boys can do—; and, when the boys marry, they'll look for some one rather more domesticated, perhaps even some one with a little bloom still left on her. They know the difference between a wife and a dance partner."

"Yet one does hear of such *foolish* marriages," Julia persisted gloomily; "and among mere children."

"Well, Spenser can't *think* of marrying for years," I told her. "He hasn't half finished his education yet. When the war's over, we shall have to consider that."

I tried to talk to him a little about the future, but he was too busy enjoying himself; and it was only when he came home on leave for the second time, after the armistice, that we had any discussion of plans. The *first* leave. . . . When I tell you I've no ease with children, I've told you everything: Spenser and these other boys and girls were *children*, and I found myself growing very impatient simply because they were so childish. Their ridiculous lunches and dinners and *revues* and dances—I could hardly keep *awake*! I reminded myself how young they were, I tried to imagine the contrast between London and the front. . . . But, do you know? I was just the least little bit relieved when Spenser went back! He'd told me nothing, I'd never had him to myself; at first he was night and day with his Rene Barling and his Dot Fairclough, then with his Virginie Burnley. I nearly asked him why he didn't call her "Virginia," which was what she was christened; "Virginie" . . . it was all of a piece with the utter artificiality and *silliness* of that week.

And I had *so* looked forward to it! If he'd just hinted that he was glad to be with me again, if he'd thanked me for the letters that were sometimes so cruelly difficult to write . . .

For the last six months of the war I felt I must be very careful not to degenerate into a sentimental bore, a hen with one chicken. As boys grow up and become worldly, they are so terribly hard and intolerant! I had to adopt an unsentimental, "hail-fellow-well-met" tone in my letters; and, when the armistice was signed, when I went to tell my maid and found her on her knees and weeping because her sweetheart was out of danger, when I broke down myself and cried aloud to God, even then I had to be "breezy" and unemotional with Spenser.

"You've made a clean job of it at last," I wrote. "Now we can have a holiday together. Let me know how soon you'll get any leave again, and I'll arrange a grand celebration."

He came home a week before Christmas, and I was given a list of the things he wanted to see. And a list of the people he wanted invited to the dance he'd decided I must give. Some of the names were unfamiliar, but many I recognized as belonging to the insufferable young people who had lived in his pocket when he was home before. Well, I said nothing. I wanted him to enjoy himself, I was desperately happy at the thought of seeing him again; and, whatever might happen at the moment, I knew that I should ultimately control his movements.

I went to meet him at the station and had rather a shock when I found Julia *and* Virginia Burnley on the platform. He'd apparently written to them too; and, while it would have been absurd to mind, I was a little piqued to find him sharing himself with others. As *I'd* introduced him to Virginia, I couldn't object to her being there, though I was quite absurdly annoyed to find that he'd taken her into his confidence over something that he hadn't even mentioned to me. It was the demobilization scheme: he'd written to say that he could get out of the army at once if he scheduled himself in class something or other as a "student". Seeing that it was *my* money that would make him a student, I thought it would have been rather more courteous if he'd discussed it with me; but, when I found he hadn't discussed it with his mother, I told myself to have a little imagination and to remember that young people *far* prefer to make plans with those of their own age. . . . And, when I remembered the Dot Faircloughs and Rene Barlings on his list, I was thankful to find him making a confidante of any one as harmless as Virginia, who had no nonsense about her and would have been very quickly rapped over the knuckles by her parents if she'd outraged the Emperor's Gate canons of propriety. . . .

As I was glad to be able to tell poor Julia! She seemed to think a girl must, at the very least, be engaged before she could come to meet a man at the station! I tried to explain how the relationship between boys and girls had *changed* with the war. I told her—with every possible allowance for her feelings—that Fritz Burnley would laugh in her face at the idea that there could be anything

between his Virginia and a child of eighteen who'd been ten months in the army and was just thinking of going to the university. . . . Poor soul, her world was such a phantasmagoria of dissolute men, abandoned girls and scheming mothers that she suspected a universal conspiracy to kidnap Spenser! He'd told me not to make any arrangements for the first night, and, when it came out that he and Virginia had planned weeks beforehand to dine together, Julia glared at the poor girl as though at the least she must be Spenser's mistress.

Without taking quite so serious a view, I did feel, now that the war was over, that Spenser ought to turn his steps towards peace conditions before he altogether lost the power of work. It would have done more harm than good to approach him direct and to suggest that Virginia was simply wasting his time, but, when I saw Mildred Burnley, I said casually: "I understand you had Spenser dining with you the other night." She looked very much surprised, so I said that I must be mistaken but that he had certainly dined with Virginia. It was a thing I *knew* she wouldn't approve of, and I felt that it was only fair to warn her; I presume something must have been said afterwards to the girl, for, whenever they dined together during the remainder of the leave, Mildred or I was in attendance. We were sufficiently women of the world not to take the affair seriously, and I'm sure we gave them the utmost liberty to meet and chatter together. Eighteen and a half and eighteen! There was no need to become alarmed about that, but I was only anxious for Spenser to realize that he mustn't behave to a girl like Virginia in the free-and-easy fashion that was good enough for the little nondescripts that he'd picked up when he was on leave before; and it was essential for him to get to work without further loss of time.

Or so I told him. . .

5

If I were dressing myself up, I should pretend that I was thinking only of his interests. I wasn't thinking of them at all! It was the whip-hand.

While Julia was timidly hoping that her boy—*her* boy!—wasn't being led away by his wild, extravagant companions, while Virginia kept saying that "mother was really too ridiculous," it was *I* who brought him to heel—and made him wag his tail as he came. And I let them see it. I told him what a brilliant career his father had had at Oxford, how closely his mother and he and my father and I were associated with Oxford; before the war we'd decided that *he* must go to Oxford too . . . if he could get a scholarship. . . . Well, the war had interrupted his studies and made that difficult, but perhaps a way could be found; did he *want* to go there? . . .

Of course, when he could forget the army and Virginia for a moment, when he remembered his childhood and Julia's insistence on his fighting his way through the world inch by inch, not looking to any one for help, he became more modest in tone and said that Oxford would be the greatest opportunity in the world—if it could be arranged. I said I'd look into things; and, when next Virginia came to the house, I told him in front of her that I would arrange it, but that he must be prepared to put work before everything. Then we talked of the time *after* Oxford. Those, of course, were the days when all the young officers were demobilizing themselves and looking frantically for jobs; and I thought it well that these two young people should see that, where others looked and found nothing, I could put my hand on half-a-dozen appointments. The Foreign Office was in many ways my goal, and, if anything *could* be done, Sir Clifford Malmesbury would do it for me; but I was prepared to consider commerce, Max Poynter had told me that he'd take *twenty* men if he only knew something about them or could find a friend to stand sponsor. . . . I made Spenser realize that I held a golden key, while Fritz Burnley—well, he was earning a big income himself, but there the thing began and ended.

Before Spenser's leave was over, I'd entered his name at Trinity and set the machine working to get him out of the army as soon as possible. General Bellew came to my aid so vigorously that we had him back a week before

the beginning of term ; and, as soon as I'd seen him comfortably established, I closed my house and went to Paris. Everybody one knew was crowding out there to the peace conference ; and, when my hospital was closed, I said openly that I deserved a holiday. I crossed on the same boat as the Burnleys, who were going to Saint-Raphaël ; and we greeted one another with a surprise that was perhaps a little insincere on my part if you consider that I'd refused to stir out of England until Virginia was at a distance where she couldn't waste Spenser's time and fill his head with a nonsensical idea that they were in love. More than once I'd made up my mind to speak very plainly to her ; but the whole thing was so absurd that I felt I might only drive them into each other's arms by opposing them. At least that was what I pretended ; I went abroad—far from London, Chelsea, Oxford, all my friends, all my memories, all the setting of my life—, because I wanted to think out what I *did* feel. . . .

Something had happened which I never mentioned to Spenser or Julia or Mildred Burnley or any one. Until this moment I've never told a living soul. . . .

6

It was on the last night of Spenser's second leave. . . .

We had Virginia dining with us, and, when the time came for her to go, he went downstairs to find a taxi and take her home ; I said good-night to both and told him to turn out the lights, as I was going to bed. When I'd written two notes, I came out on to the landing and saw the lights still burning in the hall ; the drawing-room door was open, so I suppose I can have made no noise, and, as I looked over the banisters, I saw them standing at the foot of the stairs.

For a moment I thought she must have fainted and that Spenser was holding her up ; then I saw that he'd thrown his arms about her and was squeezing her to his heart, while *she* . . . Do you remember an old fairy-

tale book of ours with a picture of the Moon when she came down to earth disguised in a cloak and hood? Something caused the hood to fall back, and the picture shews her face and hair and shoulders one dazzling blaze of silver light. . . . I *thought* of that picture *then*: they'd put on their things, but Spenser's hat was on the floor and Virginia's cloak had slipped half-way to the ground. Bursting free from it was that suggestion of blazing light.

You know her: almost white hair, a perfectly white skin and the face of a child-angel. . . . She was wearing a black frock cut away to the waist and a tulle scarf that had fallen like the Moon's hood in the picture; her arms were hanging by her sides, her head had dropped back till I saw her face white and motionless. She was in a trance. . . . And then I saw her move; the arms groped their way up, felt for his cheeks and drew his face down till she could kiss his lips; they flashed up, no longer groping, and twined about his neck. . . .

Spenser rocked and stumbled as she clung to him; he took a step forward and steadied himself against the wall as her arms dropped again to her sides and she sank away from him. *Then* I saw her opening her eyes and staring about her as she recovered consciousness; Spenser bent down for his hat, she gave a twitch to her shoulder-straps, stood up slowly, uncertainly, walked dizzily to the door leaning on him and crossing her feet as though she were still in her trance. . . .

There was a click as the lights were turned out, a bang as the door closed; I heard an engine starting, and the taxi drove away. . . I stole upstairs and locked myself in my room to think it all out. . . .

I told myself, as I'd told Julia, that they were eighteen and a half and eighteen. Kissing? Boys and girls did kiss nowadays with quite extraordinary freedom; the Dot Faircloughs and Rene Barlings that Spenser met at dances were furious, I was told, if a man didn't drive them home and insist on kissing them in the taxi—otherwise they felt slighted. There are kisses that mean little, no doubt, and kisses where your soul gushes forth at the

quaver of a man's lips on yours; these babies hadn't realized that, perhaps . . . until now. I made every kind of excuse for them. . . .

No!

No, I made every kind of excuse for *myself*. I *wouldn't* believe it was true. . . .

"And if it *is* true?" I said. . . "If they're in love, if they continue in love, if they come to you some day and tell you they want to be married? What then? You'd hate to give Spenser up to any other woman, however happy she'd make him; but you've always realized that a time would come when you'd *have* to give him up, you've talked to his mother about the difference between the girls one dances with and the girls one marries. Don't run away from it," I said; "you knew it would come. At this moment you'd like to draw hot irons across Virginia's face so that you seared her flesh until no man could bear to kiss it and scorched her eyes until they never again melted in ecstasy for any one; but, when the day comes to choose a wife for Spenser, you'll be glad to find any one as good. She's pure as her name; she's fresh as a spring flower—and as lovely. . . . Anything more? She'll be rich. . . . Anything more?"

Oh, I made excuses for her. . . .

And Spenser was in love with her . . . or *thought* he was. I made excuses for *him*. . . . Poor sweet eighteen and a half! It wouldn't *be* eighteen and a half if it didn't fall in love with the first pretty face! He'd write to her furiously for a month and kiss her photograph; and, when I took him to visit his father's grave in Switzerland, he'd fall in love with one girl on the way out and three there and one on the way back. . . .

Lies! Lies! Lies!

I'd *known* the "love" in which you submit to a drunkard's caresses to keep him quiet; in imagination I'd known the graceful pretence of loving a man you could never love; and once I'd known the love where your bones turned to water and a flame ran through you and your brain burst! *Once*. . . . For one moment in all my life, twenty years before. . . . When I'd said good-

night and hurried into the hall and stood praying blindly to be caught up and held before I swooned. . . .

And after that one moment I'd gone upstairs and locked the door, locked myself in. . . .

I'd locked my door again, but this time it was because I didn't wish to be disturbed. This had to be thought over. . . . Yet I might have known that Spenser wouldn't go to bed without our good-night. . . . I heard a tap ; a voice said :

"Are you still up, darling ? I saw Virginie home and I've just got back. I've been thinking I'd better say good-bye now, because the train goes so frightfully early and I don't want to wake you up."

I opened the door and let him in. I think I expected to find him ashamed of himself ; and, when he wasn't, I nearly reviled him for his ingratitude and treachery, I, who had taught him to think only of himself ! . . . Ingratitude ? He went on talking, and I found he was thanking me for the wonderful time I'd given him and for *all* my kindness, especially for my kindness in making it possible for him to go to Oxford. His voice came nearer and nearer. . . . Or, rather, I came nearer and nearer to his voice, out of the past, the black distance, my madness. I saw him now as the old familiar Spenser, his grey eyes dark by night, smiling, happy, a little bit awkward, as he always was when he tried to thank me.

"But I shall be down to give you your breakfast," I said. Then I realized that it must be a long time since he talked about the early train and saying good-bye now. "Will you do one thing for me, Spenser ?" I asked.

"You know I'd do anything in the world," he said.

"Well, don't thank me," I begged him. "It embarrasses both of us. Dear heart, don't you know there's nothing I wouldn't give you if I could ? My life's not always been very happy, and I didn't seem to have any object till you came into it. When you're young, you think that happiness consists in having things,—health, money, love—; but, as you grow older, I think you find that unhappiness consists in having things you can't use, and the unhappiest person in the world is that man

or woman who has love that nobody wants. Once I didn't think I had much love to give. Then God sent you to me, and I could give you all and pray that I had more to give you ; and, so long as you go on taking it, so long as you *will* do anything in the world for me, I hate to be thanked."

Dear child, his eyes filled with tears ! He knelt down and took my hands and put his between them.

"I swear that I will be true and faithful to my sovereign lady now and for ever," he whispered.

Then he jumped up and kissed me—such a poor, cold peck at my cheek ! I put my arms round him and said : "God bless and keep you ! " ; and he kissed my forehead, and then we said good-night. Oh, he was very chivalrous, reverent . . . but he kept his passion for his Virginia. . . .

I didn't go to bed that night because I knew I couldn't sleep. I wasn't unhappy, but I was restless and utterly bewildered. Those two little scenes—in the hall and in my room ; his manner to me and his manner to Virginia ; a kiss that was like shaking my hand, and a kiss that sent her reeling blindly against the wall. . . . Somewhere, in all the seething turmoil of my thoughts, Spenser—*my* Spenser—came in ; a twenty-year-old dream, an unsuspected yearning which I thought I'd killed when I'd only driven it underground. From him, from *some* one, from *any* one I wanted the passion that this boy squandered on Virginia. Yes, *squandered* : *she* didn't know its value, because she'd never known the hell of being without it. Eighteen

Dear God, couldn't she have waited ? . . .

Forty-three. . . . I had a look at myself in the glass. No one would ever have thought I was that age, even when I felt great lines of pain carving themselves into my face ; but no one—certainly not Virginia—would have thought me eighteen. The mercilessness of youth ! Its arrogance ! I saw her again as I'd seen her over the stair-head : lily-white with her rounded bosom and the soft, strong arms that held him so gently, so warmly. I'd thought I was dead to passion, I was *glad* ; and now I knew that passion was alive and scorching me. . . .

When I'd seen Spencer off, I went round to the Burnleys. . . . Why? I think I had some crazy idea of telling Virginia that she mustn't fill his head with any nonsense about being in love, that the next few years would be very critical and nothing must be allowed to interfere with his work. . . . Yes! I was going to say that I'd seen them the night before and was *shocked* and considered it my duty to tell her mother that the less they saw of each other the better. . . . Did I say a word?

I *meekly* handed over the little gold bag that Spenser had taken care of and forgotten to give back! We talked. . . . She asked me whether "Paris leave" continued after the armistice, because her father was going to the conference and taking her; she was going on to the Riviera and wondered if she could see Spenser on the way. I said I didn't know about leave; and even *then* I dared not tell her to let him alone. I said that I was thinking of going to Paris as soon as I could wind up my hospital business. . . . Some idea of being on the spot if Spenser *did* go there before he was demobilized. . . . And a nightmare feeling that, when he was back in England, I could never leave him so long as Virginia was within reach. . . . I wondered if I *dared* tell her mother how they'd been behaving and get her letters stopped. . . .

As I told you, I went away to think things out; Chelsea was *haunted* by Spenser. I suppose self-protection comes first to the top in everything and I determined to keep Virginia away at the point of a bayonet: there's nothing I wouldn't have done. I'd have found a man to fall in love with her, kidnap her. . . . And, when she was out of the way and the atmosphere was normal again, I could think what to do. . . .

That was the way I put it to myself *then*. . . .

You weren't in Paris, were you, after the armistice? The whole world had gone mad: eating, drinking, spending, dancing, making love; it must have been like the days after the Terror. A heavenly relief, of course, among the people who were no longer in danger; and, among the others, an almost conscious attempt to make up for lost time, to recover their youth—the very attempt

I'd made, after Martin's death, to win back the seven years I'd wasted on him. . . . That, at least, was how it seemed to me ; and, when every one was being thoroughly frivolous and childish, I joined in. George Brentwood was there *en garçon*, with a party ; and Barbara Oakleigh ; and Lord Pentyre and his sister : all my younger, more *expensive* friends. . . .

But *my* attempt was quite conscious and deliberate. I wanted to see how young I could make myself. Forty-three . . . and Spencer was not yet quite nineteen. . . .

I'd resolved to marry Spenser. . . .

CHAPTER NINE

I

HAVE you ever considered, Ada, how you would indicate to a man who had never even thought you marriageable that you were not only marriageable but willing to marry *him*? Have you ever considered how you would hypnotize him into fancying that he wanted to marry you, *must* marry you? That was my task with Spenser. And I saw I should have to use such force that he would seem to be compelling me against my will. . . .

You see, I'd been a widow so long that no one thought I should marry again, and that always means that *most* people think you can't marry if you want to—which is absurd if you remember how George Brentwood haunted my house after Martin's death—; and I was so well known that there could be no secrecy about what was happening. People would see that Spenser was a mere boy; and, though I wasn't *old*, there'd be some friend with an uncontrollable memory who would recall that she'd met me at the Paris Exhibition on my honeymoon.

"Twenty years ago!" you can hear Winnie Ashwin saying. "How time flies! Then she must be at *least* forty . . . oh, more; I know, because I was at school with her. Really, it's rather a shame to be marrying such a child. I believe she was very good in paying for his education and I suppose he's doing it out of gratitude, but it's wicked to snatch him like that before he's seen anything of the world. She's young for her age, of course; but, when *he's* thirty, *she'll* be over fifty. . . Disgusting!"

That's how they'd talk. I should have to face that. And I could only overcome it and recover my own prestige

by making known that Spenser had begged and entreated and worried me to marry him until I hadn't the heart to go on saying "no". As Eleanor Ross did with that subaltern who—mercifully for him—was killed before they could be married. . . . People would believe that—and perhaps forgive me—, if I took a little trouble; *and* if I could make Spenser fall in love with me, to begin with! It wasn't enough for him to marry me out of gratitude or to think I should give him a comfortable home or help him in his career; he had to want me so much that he made himself ill with longing. I had to light a fire in him and keep it blazing week after week, hotter and hotter with every refusal. . . . I wondered whether I *could* . . . and whether I should be able to hold out. . . . I remembered the sight of him when his flesh *was* on fire, on fire for Virginia Burnley and all her maddening softness and youth; and, as always, I wondered again how to begin. . . .

Before everything else I set myself to keep *her* away. She'd told me how long she would be at Saint-Raphaël; and, as *she* came back, I brought Spenser out to Paris and took him to Rome, with the Poynters, for Easter. If they met during the summer term, it wouldn't be thanks to me, for I was prepared to spend the summer in Oxford; up my sleeve I had a biographical sketch of father—I hadn't written a word of it, though I'd advertised in *The Times* for letters—and I could say that I was coming to collect personal impressions from the people who'd known him. . . .

But that was in the future; my present task was to make our Easter in Rome—what shall I call it?—a sample of what I could do—my life, my connections, my personality. Max Poynter is one of the oldest Catholic peers in England, but I eclipsed him from the moment it was known that Marion Shelley was in Rome; I found I was international, I could collect my *salon* at the Elysée Palace as easily as in Chelsea . . . or Paris. And Spenser was at an age when he would give his ears to meet Epstein or Diagelev or George Moore; I wasn't sorry that he should see this side of me.

Rome, too, was an opportunity for establishing ourselves on an entirely new basis. If you know Margaret Poynter, you'll realize that to stay in the same hotel, lunching and dining at the same table, is purgatory! She would learn a subject by heart and reel it off at us for an hour at a time—pages of Bædeker declaimed at us as though she'd discovered a new religion—as in fact she had.

"The Mamertine Prison. Ah, what secrets it could tell! You know it's one of the earliest buildings in Rome. Servius Tullius . . ."

When she'd done, Spenser whispered to me:

"Does she know *anything* she talks about? I wasn't listening particularly, but I caught her out *three* times." . . .

A day or two later I noticed that she was getting on his nerves with her lust for improving the occasion; and that gave me my chance. Spenser said:

"Why on earth did you saddle yourself with those appalling bores?"

"Simply as a matter of convenience," I told him.

"*Convenience?*" he cried.

"Margaret told me she was coming to Rome," I explained, "and, as you and I couldn't come here alone——"

"Why not?" Spenser interrupted.

I said nothing for a moment; and, when Spenser repeated "Why not?" and I met his eyes rather awkwardly, I was red enough in the face to seem quite embarrassed.

"Well, I'm still a young woman," I said, "and you're a young man. . . . I've been meaning to speak to you about this for some time, Spenser. During the war things were *different*: you stayed with me as a matter of course when you came home on leave; and before that in your holidays; but *now*, though *I've* not changed, you've very much a grown man, and, if you stayed with me alone in Paris or here—among people who wouldn't quite understand—, I'm afraid it would give rise to comment."

"Oh, but what absolute rot!" Spenser exclaimed. "If I can stay with you in London, I can stay with you here."

I rather wished he hadn't said it just at that moment ! I wanted to introduce the subject and then leave it to sink into his mind until he realized that, if he was in a position to compromise me, he was in a position to marry me. That dreadful habit of carrying things to their logical conclusions ! It was so like his father. In a moment he'd raised the question to the highest plane ; and I wasn't ready for it.

"That's not quite the same," I said vaguely.

"But why not ? You've always told me to regard Chelsea as my home ; if it's all right for me to stay there with you, surely it's all right for me to come abroad with you."

I had to accept the challenge ; to this day I don't see what else I could have done. . . .

"It's all *right*," I told him, "but we have a little to consider what other people think—and say. If I were years older, it wouldn't be necessary for me to talk like this ; but the Marchesa Contarini asked Lady Poynter the other day if you were my brother and, if not, *who* you were, and, so long as there's the least opportunity for misunderstanding, I prefer to err on the side of excessive prudence. When we get back to London, I shall have to make a little change ; and, when you come to stay with me, perhaps I shall be able to prevail on your mother to join us. *You* think it's all great nonsense, but I can assure you it's so important that I can't take any risks ; and I know you wouldn't want to do anything that might compromise me."

"I think it's absolute rot," was all Spenser would say, and I felt that I had not made a very successful beginning. I felt, too, that Master Spenser might become rather a handful ; hitherto his mother had been the only person to check him, and, when I lured him away from her by bribes and kept his affection by spoiling him, I could only coax him to do things by spoiling him even more. . . .

I stuck to my point, though, and, when we returned to London, I had first one person and then another to keep us in countenance. When *you* came for part of the time,

Ada, I don't know whether you ever guessed my reason for inviting you. . . . More than that : I gave up my habit of going into his room to say good-night to him. Anything that savoured of motherliness had to be dropped ; anything that could make me remote or mysterious I cultivated. Spenser must have noticed the general change, but I don't know whether he explained it to himself as I wanted ; I don't know whether he even tried to explain it at all. . . .

At the same time I changed my outdoor life. Hitherto he had been very much my school-boy son home for the holidays ; I had always bought the tickets and paid for the dinners ; now, although the money came from the same purse in the first instance, I preferred him to have an allowance and to give me little treats out of that. It was ridiculously difficult to begin, but, when he'd suggested a theatre and I'd said I should like to come and would he see about tickets, he dropped into my new scheme : we took each other out in turn, thanked each other afterwards : and his attitude did change. Of course, it pandered to his self-importance, especially if a lot of people came up and spoke and I indicated that *he* was the host.

Make-believe, if you like, but it imposed on me too a little bit, and I responded by playing up as well as I could. I think Spenser was quite startled to find what good company I was. . . .

My greatest triumph came one night when I'd told Margaret Poynter to send him a card for her dance. You naturally could not expect Spenser to know many people there : even in her most democratic moments Margaret Poynter would hardly invite the Dot Faircloughs that all these young men took out to lunch and dinner when they were home on leave, and he'd had so little time to meet the other kind that, with the exception of perhaps three girls whom I'd invited to Chelsea in the hope that they might leaven the mass, there was no one he knew. He entered the ball-room like a lord of creation ; but I soon saw him riveted to the wall, pulling on his gloves and dragging them off again to give himself something to do ; I introduced him to a few people, and that gave

me a little bit of an advantage by shewing him that even lords of creation had their limitations ; and then I had my great success.

Hardly was I in the room before George Brentwood rushed up and said :

"Marion ! I've not seen you since that last night at the Hôtel St. Germain."

"When we were all quite mad !" I said. Then I introduced Spenser. "Lord Brentwood and I met in Paris," I explained, "during the peace conference. And we behaved like children. I don't think I've ever been so foolish, but I *know* I've never enjoyed myself more."

"There's nothing foolish in having a little dinner somewhere," said George, "and dancing. . . . Are you engaged for this ?"

And Spenser fondly believed I couldn't dance. Well, he revised his opinion when I glided away on George's arm and left him alone and defenceless by the wall. I had three with George ; and one with Philip Carlow ; and one with Michael Frinton ; and two with a boy I could have sworn I'd never seen before, though he assured me that he'd been to my house. And *another* boy, who *also* said he'd been to my house, carried me off to supper.

I had a look at myself in Margaret's big Florentine mirror as I went downstairs ; *you* know that, as a rule, I don't approve of women dancing when they're past thirty, simply because they usually look such frights—they've so often begun to spread by then, and their dresses aren't made for dancing, and they themselves get flushed and out of breath— ; well, I had a look at myself. . . . People always used to say that my parties went well because I shed such a radiance over them. It wasn't that in the least ; my parties went well because I knew how to run them ; and I looked radiant because they went well. However hard I'm dancing, I'm never afraid of coming to pieces or finding my face scarlet and shiny ; and, *when* I look radiant, I seem to go to men's heads. George was hovering outside the dining-room all the time I was having supper ; he followed me upstairs, begging for

another dance ; and, though I was enjoying myself, I had to refuse him for fear he'd try to propose again.

"I must go home as soon as I've found Spenser," I said.

Poor Spenser ! He was still standing at the door, but by now he'd pulled the buttons off both his gloves ; and he'd had no supper. I asked him the time—and pretended to be appalled to find how late it was.

"Mayn't I have *one* before we go ?" he asked, almost in tears.

"Of course you may !" I said. "Why didn't you ask me before ?"

"I don't know. . . I—didn't realize you danced." . . .

I didn't tell him that I'd not danced six times since I taught his father to waltz at the Infirmary Ball twenty years before. I didn't tell him that I *couldn't* do these new dances till I went to Paris, and the others at the St. Germain made me learn. . . .

"During the war I really hadn't the heart," I said. "It was well enough for people who came home on leave, but so many women seized any excuse for having a good time *themselves*." . . .

When we'd gone half-way round the room, he said :

"But you dance *divinely* !"

"I used to be very fond of it," I said, "but, when my husband died, I gave it up. There was an idea in those days that a widow had to forswear anything frivolous, anything that might make her forget for a moment." . . .

As we drove home that night, Spenser said :

"Were you very much in love with your husband ?"

"When we married—yes," I told him. "Afterwards Martin outgrew my love. Do you remember my saying once that unhappiness consisted in having what nobody wanted ? Until you came into my life, no one seemed to want such love as I had to offer. So I was rather unhappy. . . . I don't know what you've heard about me, but people will probably tell you that I've had an uphill fight and that, on the whole, I've come through with credit. I suppose I'm rather reserved, I don't talk about it ; but I feel people are always a little sorry for me. They

were, rather ; I don't need sympathy now, so perhaps I've closed my petals till I don't feel it any longer ; I've been very happy since you brought me a new interest."

2

We sat talking till day-light !

Spenser was intrigued by the glimpse he'd had of me in an unfamiliar setting. He pretended that he wanted to know about the party generally, but I noticed that his questions narrowed themselves down to the men I'd danced with—and from that to one in particular. I've lived long enough in the very heart of London to fancy I know something about it ; but, for all the talk and the eternal personalities and the malice that masquerades as candour, I've never found men or women who saw themselves as the rest of us saw them. I'm no exception ! I'm telling you now exactly how I see myself ; and I'm clever enough to know when I've hammered a thing out and expressed it truly. But do you imagine that, if you quoted me word for word, you'd be believed by Margaret Poynter or Agatha Wilmot or Julia Woodrow or your own husband or George Brentwood ? . . . What are those lines ?

" I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secrecy on one of all these words !
You're shrewd and know that should you publish one
The world would brand the lie—my enemies first.
Who'd sneer—" the bishop's an arch-hypocrite
And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."

" *My enemies first.*" . . . Margaret Poynter hates me because she fears me ; but she judges every one by her own standard and she wouldn't believe that the whole of my life could be deliberately artificial. I don't know what they'll say of me when I'm dead, I don't know what they say now ; I didn't know, that night, how much any one had told Spenser about George Brentwood.

So, when his name was mentioned, I said that we were old friends and that George had been in love with me before

I married Martin and had wanted to marry me when Martin died; his own life was rather a tragedy, I said, and he was haunted by the idea that he'd missed his chance of happiness. . . . I didn't think it would do Spenser any harm to see that there were men I could have for the asking; it gave light and shade to this new picture of me that he'd seen for a moment that night. Hitherto he'd had me so much to himself, telling me to give a dance for him or sending me out to buy tickets, that he couldn't decide whether to be jealous or just consumedly interested to find that, as I was only an episode—however useful—in his life, he might be only an episode in mine. Those hours of standing about by Margaret Poynter's door had made him think very hard: he hadn't realized my life before, perhaps he didn't come into it even as an episode; when I told him how devoted I was to him, it may only have meant that I bought him for amusement and companionship, as I might have bought a pair of bullfinches. . . .

"You never thought of marrying again?" he asked suddenly.

Ah, if he'd said "think" instead of "thought" . . . But he was still brooding over George, without liking to ask a direct question.

"Many times," I said. "But it's only when you've been married that you realize what a tremendous risk and responsibility it is: it may bring you the most perfect happiness that any one can know in this world, or it may ruin your life; and nearly every marriage is a meeting of these extremes. When you're very young, you think that happiness comes naturally and that you have a right to it as much as to life and health; when you're older, you see that you must struggle as hard to keep unhappiness away as a sick man struggles to banish ill-health. After one experiment and one failure, I would sooner remain unmarried than accept anything short of perfect happiness. Lord Brentwood, I feel, would give me *almost* everything; I've never felt—yet—that he would give me *everything*."

Yet . . . Oh, I put that in to suggest that George was by no means finally dismissed! Spenser sat with his

chin on his hands, thinking. After a time he began to talk about love, rather bashfully and as though he'd *once* thought he knew all about it and now wasn't quite so sure. Love, to him, was a state in which you were "frightfully keen on a girl . . . frightfully sick if another fellow came along and carted her off"; a state of mixed emotions, because "at one moment you're full of buck and at another you're most frightfully down in the mouth"; a state of obsession, because "you're always wondering when you'll see her again . . . writing to her . . . frightfully sick if she doesn't answer your letters by next post"; and of course, when you were in love, you'd gladly lay down your life for a girl. . . . Dear Spenser! The ignorance, the boyishness of all his romance. . . .

After that *I* told *him* a little about love. The strength and cruelty, the maiming and the scars; its baseness and selfishness; its glory. . . . He was frightened, at first, to think that, instead of being an affair of notes and kisses, it was a disease, a madness in which a wild beast broke from within you and struck you down, blinding you and shaking your reason from its seat. He stared at me and saw that I'd known love and something of its power. He saw that I knew it still; and, when I talked about its glory, he could see the reflection in my eyes. . . .

I don't know what I wanted. . . . When he blushed and talked of a childish tenderness (which he would outgrow six months after the girl married some one else), I realized what a child he was, I told myself that his education had not yet begun. If I'd wanted to sweep him off his feet that night, I could have done it, for he was hypnotized; but I—well, I didn't know whether I wanted to or not. Perhaps I wanted to prolong the joy of seeing him there with his grey eyes all black and shining, I wanted *him* to say something; and I'd put such a spell on him that he couldn't speak. . . . Gradually I felt my power leaving me; I was tired . . . talking without saying anything; I didn't stop deliberately, I came to an end. . . .

And then I rallied for a moment to say:

"That's love, Spenser, as I understand it. Heaven and hell in one. And, until you've burnt your boats and flung

yourself into the midst of it, you don't know which it is. You can never play for safety. With love it's all or nothing ; and, until you recognize love from my description, have nothing to do with it or you'll find yourself following a will-o'-the-wisp."

I stood up and offered him my hands. He sat without moving, dazed. His eye-lids flickered, as he looked up at me, and he said :

"I didn't know you were anything like that !"

"Like what ?" I asked. "A very ordinary, very human creature I am, Spenser ; you'll find thousands of me in every street ; hitherto you've only seen me behind a table, with a tea-pot in my hand : now I've lifted a corner of the veil and shewn you what a woman looks like when she's been through the fire." . . .

Dear God, how I hated the phrase ! Hackneyed, vulgar, false—a thing of the stage, to be said with a "brave, tremulous laugh"—; romantic sham-heroic . . . and the one phrase for my poor Spenser at that moment !

"I'd never *guessed* . . ." he muttered.

"That I had scars or that I was too proud to shew them to any one but a man whose love and sympathy I could trust ? Or perhaps you thought I *was* just a thing in female clothes, sitting at a tea-table ? . . . Spenser, my child, it's four o'clock ! Kiss me good-night and run up to bed. I'll write a note to say you're not to be called."

I held out my hands again, and this time he took them. He was still dazed. . . . I kissed him good-night,—and he kissed me. I—kissed him again and put my arms about him ; and he gave me a funny bewildered hug. . . . We went upstairs, and he kissed me again—this time without any prompting—and murmured something ; he didn't know what to say or do. . . .

"We mustn't wake your mother up," I said.

"By Jove, no ! I'd forgotten her," he said.

It was as though he were recovering from an anæsthetic !

That was the first lucid thing he'd said.

When I got to my room I thought him over very carefully—thought over the night and the whole evening

before. Love. . . . The meaning of love was beginning to dawn on Spenser ; and in future he would never give that name to the first flicker of interest stirred by some little fool with big eyes and a drooping mouth.

He wasn't in love with me, though, and I was sure that I'd been ever so wise not to carry him along too fast. He was—well, he was in love with love ; and henceforward he would be restless and unsatisfied until he'd found an object for his love, for such love as I'd described ; I'd thrown a challenge to his manhood. I had nothing to regret ; and soon, quite soon, I should have something that would fill and swamp my life in the way I'd told him. . . .

I wonder what you think of it all, Ada. . . .

Deal with facts : I was in love with him—the strongest passion in the world—, I'd been in love with him since the night when I saw him kissing Virginia (oh, long before, and that just told me) ; I'd made up my mind to marry him. . . . Personally, I don't think you can interpose ethics here any more than between a lion and his prey : it was nature, and ethics are only customs that we find convenient when unchecked nature becomes a nuisance in civilized society. I was a few months older than his mother, you'll say, and, though I broke no law, I was spoiling his life for my own pleasure as much as when a man ruins a young girl. Well . . .

In the first place, I don't agree, because I'd have been a better wife for him than any nursling of twenty. And, in the second place, I'd *made* him anything he was, so I'd a perfect right to trade on his gratitude. But, if you call it a crime, I'll meet you on that ground : would you have minded if he'd been forty-five—with money—and I'd been nineteen—without ? Would you have cried out against my trying to catch him or his trying to steal a mere child ? Not for a moment ! You'd have talked about “ a certain difference of age ” and said I was making a very good match ; you would never have thought that, when I was thirty, he'd have been nearly sixty.

And, youth apart, I was bringing him a thousand times more than he brought me. I was a wholesome human being, into the bargain ; and, though you *naturally* expect

that of me, you only shrug your shoulders at the idea of my marrying Martin, who was already a hopeless drunkard and was never faithful to any woman for six months. . . . I know I *forced* Martin to marry me, but no one—except father—thought that I was sacrificing myself to a middle-aged libertine; if I forced myself on to Spenser, there'd be far less sacrifice from him. . . .

I can see quite clearly now that Martin played a tremendous part in my thoughts. Margaret Poynter would quote Freud (unless she's found a later fashion) and tell you it was a "repression." I daresay it was: Martin had left a mark on my soul which made me hate men and want to revenge myself on them—I've no doubt that was why I played cat-and-mouse with George Brentwood—; I definitely shouldn't have refused to make Spenser the price of all I'd suffered from Martin; but stronger than any idea of revenge was a yearning for *contrast*: after Martin I did so want some one clean, fresh, clear-cut, young. . . .

And I *know* there was something purely mental in my love—imaginary, if you like—: Spenser was the bone and blood of his own father, who was the only man to stir me. I'm *sick* of hearing about "great passions" from idiots who don't know the meaning of words, but, when once you've been really in love, you can only forget by falling in love with some one else: I thought my Spenser had faded away in the more material excitement of my own marriage and in the bustle of a new life, I made sure of it when *he* married and had a child. But the hunger was there, inside me; *he'd* made me hungry, and, though I forgot my hunger, nothing and nobody satisfied it. . . .

And then this boy came to me. . . .

But I'm afraid I don't in the least care what any one thinks. Go back to the facts; I was in love with Spenser and I'd determined to marry him. . . .

3

When he came down to lunch after our night of confidences, he was very much embarrassed. So was I,

though I didn't shew it; and I was glad to have Julia there, asking all the right, ridiculous questions about Oxford: had he told the shop to mark his new collars, and wouldn't it be better to buy his flannel trousers in London, as the Oxford prices were so terribly high? I hinted diplomatically that I never wanted to hear that eternal "Can we afford it?" again: I was paying; and Oxford, I said, ought to be—in the best sense of the word—the most careless time in a man's life; my whole scheme would be spoilt if Spenser had to trouble about insignificant sums, and I wished him to have money not only to spend but to *waste*, if he liked. That silenced Julia, as I intended; and it made Spenser articulate, as I'd also intended; though I'd begged him not to thank me, I wouldn't then relax any kind of hold on him; and I wanted to give him a text for the moment when he came to say good-bye.

He thanked me—formally—for having him to stay with me and for the wonderful time I'd given him in Rome; then he tried to thank me more generally, and of course I stopped him.

"Don't you see," I said, "that my happiness is bound up in yours? You're inviting me to thank myself."

"I can't see why you should bother about me," he said.

"Call it the whim of a woman whose life is rather empty," I told him with a little laugh.

He became very pink in the face and stood looking down and kicking one toe into the carpet.

"I've been thinking a lot lately," he said. "I didn't even guess till you told me last night. . . . I thought you had pots of money and were a friend of mother's and it was, well, just a frightfully jolly 'whim.' I feel rather a brute for taking everything quite so much for granted. I . . . wish you'd told me before."

"But what difference could it have made?" I asked.

"I don't know. If I'd any idea you weren't happy, I'd have behaved a bit differently."

"Nobody could have behaved more sweetly than you have," I told him, "and I've not been unhappy since I had you to care for. Even when you were fighting, it was better to live in an agony of suspense than to have

no one to be in suspense for. So long as I have you and your affection——”

“You have that all right,” he interrupted, “but it’s a cheap sort of return.”

“I put a high price on it,” I said, “and a higher price on your love. If you loved me as I love you, I should ask nothing else of God, and you would never feel any need to thank me. . . . Good-bye, Spenser, and mind you have a very pleasant term. I shall come up to see you as soon as you invite me; and I want to hear from you whenever you can spare time. It’s no use asking me to any of the Commemoration balls, because you said last night that you didn’t know I danced.”

“I shall ask you,” he said; “and, if you don’t accept at once, I shall come and fetch you!”

I was *glad* when he’d gone. I felt worn-out and I don’t think I could have supported the strain any longer. Passion, I discovered, endures longer than our power to cope with it; I was *always* exhausted in those days. . . . *Both* of us were rather exhausted; we’d climbed to the top of a mountain, the whole world was stretched before us, we could see the road winding below and running out straight on to the plains. . . . And behind us, if we’d turned, we could have seen the road by which we’d come. There was just a question which one we should take. . . . No! There was a question how soon we should start on again and which of us should say “Are you ready?” . . . I was *glad* of a breathing-space. . . .

Though I missed him terribly, worse than in the times when he went to the front, although I had nothing in the world to make me anxious now. Virginia Burnley She was only formidable on the assumption that her parents or I paid any heed to a momentary, boy-and-girl infatuation. When I talked to Spenser about love as a wild beast that struck you down, I’ve no doubt that he’d have liked to think he knew all that from Virginia; but, when he painted his crude ideas of romance, I knew we had only to tell the pair of them to wait till they were old enough to understand the meaning of words; in some ways I rather wished that things could have come to

a head before Spenser went back to France after the armistice, so that we could have allowed the thing to die a natural death. I anticipated no trouble from her, especially as I heard from her mother that she was in Spain. . . . No, I wasn't anxious; I was just lonely.

I couldn't settle down to anything. 1920 promised to be the *annus mirabilis* for London: there were such dinners and balls and week-end parties in the first month of the season that every one frankly despaired of lasting out till July, and all one's friends seemed to give up the struggle and compete for villas at Dinard. I opened my house properly for the first time since 1914 and gave a series of parties for all the new people who'd come to the surface during the war. . . . Somehow my heart wasn't in it; everything seemed trivial and insincere; I was always running downstairs to see if there was a letter from Spenser by the late post. . . .

He was a very bad correspondent. I came as near to a lovers' quarrel as was seemly between people who were still having that breathing-space before they confessed their love. . . . Spenser would only say that he'd been terribly busy: the work for his schools, and Eights' Week, and people coming up for odd days and week-ends.

I noticed that he hadn't asked *me*. . . .

And then the invitation did come.

"*I hope you haven't forgotten about Commem.,*" he wrote. "*I've got tickets for the second House ball and of course I'm absolutely counting on you and have taken rooms in the High. Virginie is coming, and I want you to be an angel and chaperon her.*" . . .

You deserve the title of "dear, gentle," Ada, much more than I do. . . . I always fancy you must spend half your life in finding excuses for people; you think it's charity when it's really a refusal to analyse; and you always drag in "*Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner,*" which is surely the sorriest surrender ever made by a man too lazy to understand anything. In the old days when I was being more than ordinarily ruthless to Grace or Joan, you defended me—especially if their husbands joined in the attack—and said that I wasn't unsympathetic

but that I had a "masculine mind". I wonder if you had *any* idea what you were talking about!

I'm feminine, feminine to the marrow—with more knowledge, I admit, than you generally find among women and a power to weigh evidence; but that I got from being father's daughter and having the education of a man. Feminine! I was so feminine that I saw at one and the same time how I could triumph over you by a pose of masculine hardness and over the other people by the pathos of wistfulness. Did Grace and Joan ever picture me as "dear, gentle Marion"? No! But they were the only people in London who didn't. The one masculine thing about me is a habit of mind that I've deliberately cultivated. I remember, years ago, reading and copying out something that expressed one difference between the sexes: "*If I pass Mrs. A in the street without saluting her, she conjectures a dozen painful motives to account for my absent-mindedness. If she passes me, I conclude that she is short-sighted or absent-minded.*" In that, I am on the side of the men.

When I heard that Virginia was to be in Oxford, I *might* have jumped to the conclusion that she'd been there half the term, that she'd never been in Spain at all, that they were secretly engaged, that Spenser had been deceiving me. Well, I happen to have trained myself *not* to jump to conclusions in that way: I said "Let me look at *all* the explanations and take the most probable first." Now, I know something about Commemoration balls, and in my day a man *only* invited a married woman—widow or no—as a chaperon; the other women were all young girls. Virginia was one of the very few that Spenser knew well enough to ask. What more natural? Again, ever since the night when I talked to him about love, I felt that Virginia was no more than a will-o'-the-wisp; I was even surprised for a moment to find him troubling to invite her until it occurred to me that it was probably an old-standing promise. . . . But I needn't expound my whole process of reasoning; it's enough to say that I saw no cause for alarm and was only sorry to find both of them wasting their time in this way.

I wrote at once to say that I should be delighted to come ; and I made an opportunity of seeing Mildred Burnley and asking whether she was to be of the party ; I wanted to find out how far the intimacy went. . . . She told me that, if I would be kind enough to go, she wouldn't trouble ; I gathered that she and Virginia had indeed been up for one day in Eights' Week, but nothing more. Mildred, I could see, also felt there was no cause for alarm, and, from the things she said about Virginia's beauty and all the money that was coming to her, I gathered that she had much greater ambitions for the girl. So I kept my head—that *masculine* head of mine!—, thought no more about it and went to Oxford on the appointed day. Virginia and I had been given rooms together with another girl, Miss Crossleigh, who was also in my charge ; her brother, Spenser and a man named Murray Brickdale completed the party. We were even numbers, you see, and that was vitally important : if we'd been a man short, I should have known that Spenser was counting me simply as a chaperon while the others paired off according to their own sweet fancy. I was evidently intended to be an active member.

As you may imagine, I kept my eyes open to see what kind of intimacy *did* exist between those two, but, so far as I could judge, they were like everybody else. There could be no question of any great pairing off, even if they'd wished it, for Arthur Crossleigh wouldn't want to dance with his sister half the evening and with me the other half ; indeed, it worked out inevitably that of the three men the one who had fewest dances with Virginia was Spenser, and, as young Brickdale seemed already to be an old ally of the Crossleigh girl, I secured Spenser for considerably more than my fair third of him. I studied him carefully to see whether he was dissatisfied with this arrangement, but no one could have been happier. The whole evening passed without a hitch, we enjoyed ourselves immoderately.

After supper I sat out two dances with Spenser to give him an opportunity of telling me about himself, if he had anything to say. He was in the highest spirits, and

it had been a wonderful term. I asked him whether there was anything in particular he'd like to do, anywhere in particular he *and his mother* would like to go during the vacation; he said he'd much rather leave it to me, but, if it could possibly be managed, he had always hankered after the Venice trip that we'd had to postpone when war broke out.

"We can't go there till September," I warned him, "because of the climate. If you're not tired of the river, I thought we might spend July and August at Shiplake; Lord Brentwood is going abroad and he offered me his cottage there for the summer. I don't suppose your mother can get away for all the time, but we could arrange a party of some kind. And, if you have work to do, it will be very quiet."

Spenser was delighted with the idea. He repeated "July and August," then said:

"If it suits you, I should like to make it only the *first* part of August; I've promised to go to Scotland with the Burnleys in the middle of the month."

I never turned a *hair*! I think I just nodded and said:

"That means the 12th, I suppose. We'll arrange the Shiplake party before that. I may be going to Scotland myself, but I'm not sure. Are you paying any other visits?"

He didn't know yet. These Crossleights had invited him to Dorsetshire and young Brickdale to Kent, but he wanted to see what my arrangements were.

"I should certainly accept," I told him, "provided you leave yourself *some* time for work. When once you come down from here, you'll find it's not easy to stay with people. If I'm able to help you into the Foreign Office, your leave will not be very long, so you'll be wise to make use of your time now. Let me know when you're likely to be at Shiplake, and I'll ask one or two people down; let me know, too, if you have any friends of your own that you'd like me to invite."

There, I thought, I surpassed myself. He overwhelmed me with gratitude, and, as *he* hesitated to suggest Virginia, I suggested her for him. There are many ways of killing

a cat, but choking with cream is sometimes the most diplomatic. If I'd thought for a thousand years I couldn't have found a surer way of winning Spenser over. . . .

And I was as good as my word! When we got home that morning, I went into Virginia's room as she was undressing and told her that we must have a little talk together, when we were back in London, and arrange a time for her to come and stay with me. Virginia. . . . She received me with the *strictest* neutrality! When I said "a little talk together", she immediately put herself on the defensive, as though I had come to ask her what she was up to with Spenser; she was excited with dancing . . . emotional . . . and I expect she thought herself very much in love. I've no doubt that she was furiously jealous because Spenser had danced with me so often and because I danced so much better than she expected—so much better than she did, if it comes to that. I was at ease, too, while she was still young enough to be shy; good value I was. And she couldn't find fault with my dress or my looks, even at six o'clock in the morning; I was standing behind her as she brushed her hair and I could see myself in the glass. . . .

I saw her, too: very lovely, very soft and young with her smooth white arms flashing backwards and forwards against all that rippling light golden hair; a little hard and rebellious, but not the less attractive for that. And I saw her face change and break into smiles, with a sort of unspoken apology for misjudging me, when I came as her friend and accomplice. I invited her for a week and said we'd arrange the day later.

We kissed with the utmost affection. . . .

4

I wired to George Brentwood that I'd most gratefully accept the house; and then I held my hand. As soon as Spenser had committed himself to visiting the Cross-leighs, I invited Virginia for her week at a time when she would only overlap him by two days; more than that I

wouldn't allow them, for less than that I didn't think she'd come ; I was sorry, I should tell him, that things hadn't fitted in better, but there was very little accommodation and I'd asked a great many people.

Having said that, I had to make sure of keeping the house full. In asking Mildred to let the girl come, I'd hinted that she would meet more people—of what the Burnleys considered “the right kind”—with me than in Emperor's Gate ; Mildred entertained very little and had identified herself so much with the prosperous legal set that she'd stuck fast and was now concerned to get Virginia into “society” when she had never got there herself. As soon as I shewed the faintest willingness to help, either by introducing suitable people or by coaching the girl in what was done and what—quite definitely—was *not*, I had Mildred at my feet ; Virginia was handed over, everything was left to my discretion.

Even then I had some difficulty in using the powers with which I'd been armed. You see, I'd never had a house in the country, so I'd never classified my friends on a house-party basis ; and the young men I knew, who hadn't been killed, were nearly all of the literary world and quite useless for the sort of party I had in mind. I was racking my brains when the problem was solved for me. One night at Margaret Poynter's, Lord Pentyre took me down to supper and said :

“Is it true that you've got old George Brentwood's house for the summer ?”

“He has very kindly lent it to me,” I said. “I'm going there at the beginning of July—next week.”

Then I made a valuation of Bobbie Pentyre. I didn't know him well, because we had really nothing in common ; and, with the exception of Barbara Neave, I had always entertained a peculiar detestation for the noisy, self-advertising, vulgar set that he always went about with. Before the war he'd been a wild, unsatisfactory boy, always mixed up with every kind of foolish sky-larking ; and, if he'd steadied down now, it wasn't increasing wisdom or age, I'm sure, so much as a stiff knee that he'd brought back from the war. For some years we'd rather avoided

each other ; but George Brentwood's absurd parties in Paris had thrown us together, and we each found that the other wasn't so bad as we'd feared. Bobbie had rushed up the moment I came into the room. . . .

Well, he was unmarried and, so far as I knew, quite heart-whole, though Sally Farwell had been running after him ever since he came of age ; you couldn't call him rich, but there was only his mother and one brother to provide for (the sister, Grace, married last year—some fabulously wealthy man) ; Lady Pentyre always pretended that they couldn't afford to keep up Croxton, but I think she only wanted an excuse for not entertaining more. In twenty years she never *has* been able to keep it up, but death-duties and budgets and higher wages don't seem to have made her any worse off ; it was a pose, like Bobbie's pretence that he could only marry a girl who brought him a lot of money, and, if it kept Sally Farwell at a distance and allowed him to continue his old, dissolute life, it served his purpose.

He was *quite* well-off ; the title went back to the seventeenth century, though none of the Pentyres have ever done anything to distinguish themselves ; and Croxton, after all, *is* one of the historic houses, though I'd rather die than live there. On that valuation, Bobbie worked out at a very good figure, though he wasn't too wonderfully clever or too wonderfully handsome. He joined the Coldstream at the beginning of the war and, I believe, did very well ; if he wasn't quite the man I should have chosen for my daughter to marry, I daresay he was no worse than the majority of young men in his position.

And Virginia was *not* my daughter. . . .

From what I knew of the Burnleys, they'd be the last people to object, if only we could make sure of Bobbie. Though Fritz Burnley has a big position at the bar and must earn a very large income, he started from nothing at all ; and both he and his wife have worked very hard to attain greater heights. To establish Virginia at Croxton they would swallow some one very much more unpalatable than Bobbie ; if there was a question of a big settlement,

they'd make it ; and, if she resisted the glamour and tried to be romantic about Spenser, they'd make her life such a burden to her that she'd give in for peace and quiet. . . . I suppose you think I'm being callous again, Ada ? How do I make things better by saying that " no doubt Bobbie would steady down and make an admirable husband ; there was *no* reason why the marriage shouldn't be a great success " ? I didn't care whether he *beat* her so long as he married her. . . .

But would he marry her ? Well, it would do no harm to try.

" I expect you're engaged all the summer," I said. " If not, why don't you come and spend a few days at Shiplake ? I hope to have some very pleasant little parties, and if your leg will let you play—— "

In twenty years no party of mine had failed ! Ask any one ! It's something to have a reputation like that, something to be a woman whose invitations you can accept without hesitation or enquiry.

" Oh, I know the house," Bobbie interrupted. " Many's the bright gathering I've attended there. And, if I may say so, I know the way you run these things. I'd love to come. I hope old George made over the cellar to you with the rest of the house."

" Oh yes," I said, " but it will be a very quiet party, and you must be on your best behaviour. I expect to have some quite young people staying with me, and you mustn't shock them."

Then we talked about dates, and I had little difficulty in making his visit coincide with Virginia's. My reference to the " quite young people " intrigued him, and he was very anxious to know who would be there. I gave him a few names that he knew and then added Virginia's.

" She's hardly out of the school-room," I said, " and sweetly pretty ; so you must promise to behave well, or I shall have to ask you for some other week."

" I really have a great success with *ingénues*," said Bobbie.

" I've no doubt you have a great success with every one," I answered. " I've seen you at Croxton, remember ;

but, as I'm responsible to her mother, I'll say frankly that you've had certain Croxton successes that I don't want to see repeated at Shiplake."

Bobbie pretended to be quite hurt at that.

"What *is* the use of turning over a new leaf if every one insists on going back to the 'Birth and Early Years' chapter?" he asked. "I'm a changed man since the war. I want to make England a home fit for heroes and all that sort of thing; better wages, shorter hours, prohibition for the working classes. Haven't you noticed the difference? I'd settle at Croxton and become a model landlord if I could only persuade my mother to settle somewhere else; she says she won't move out until I marry, and I obviously can't marry till I find an enormously rich wife. Has the *ingénue* any money? I was meaning to offer myself in America; but, if you tell me she's eligible, I can save my passage."

"The *ingénue*'s too young for anything except to be left alone," I told him. "When she's old enough to marry, I expect she'll have quite a big fortune: her father's the K.C., you know, and she's the only child. But that won't be for some time yet, so don't go putting foolish ideas into her head; you can make yourself far too agreeable sometimes."

That seemed enough for me to say at the moment, especially as Bobbie wanted me to say a great deal more. . . .

I felt that, when he came to Shiplake, there'd be just a pleasant sense of anticipation in his mind; and I tried, by obviously rather different means, to create the same sense of anticipation in Virginia. She arrived two days before him, and the time that Spenser was in the house seemed to pass quite uneventfully. I may tell you I took care that it should; the advantage of a small party and a small house is that people *can't* slip away for hours at a time without having their absence noticed. We only had Grace's elder boy—what's the creature's name? Peter!—and Winnie Ashwin's girl, so Spenser couldn't go into hiding without spoiling the party for tennis. Inside the house I didn't break up any *tête-à-têtes* because there

weren't any to break up ; and I became more and more convinced that the Commemoration episode was simply the fulfilment of an old promise.

Virginia, perhaps, seemed *rather* in earnest : I thought she became peevish if Spenser talked to other people, and she had a trick—which I felt she'd outgrow when she was older—of following him about the room with her eyes. Well . . . she was very young and, no doubt, very certain of her empire ; when she fell in love with some one else—to apply my old rule—, she'd very quickly forget all about Spenser, but at present she was remembering vividly the coming of romance into her life, that night when I saw them over the banisters. . . .

I *wondered* what she'd think of Bobbie. . . .

I had worked quite dexterously on his behalf before he arrived, letting fall careless but very important hints to shew her exactly who and what he was ; hints, too, that would guide her to the effect I wanted her to produce on him. And, when they met, I felt that the prospect was very hopeful. So far as he observes any degrees in his behaviour, Bobbie favoured us with his best and took more trouble to discover the *atmosphere* of the house than I've ever seen him take with his own parties ; underneath the wearisome mock-smart patter that does duty for wit nowadays he is reasonably intelligent and he had the sense to leave an impression of seriousness by his conversation with me.

Later there was no harm in a little chaff and fun, especially as he found an appreciative audience : Virginia had been very silent and glum after Spenser left, and he laid himself out to amuse her ; very soon she responded, and they established a *cameraderie* which improved steadily until I thought I could help him with a little direction. Bobbie, of course, was prevented by his leg from joining the others at tennis, so we left Peter and Leila Ashwin to play singles while we spent the afternoon looking on and talking. I always tried to make the conversation so interesting that Virginia didn't want to leave us (you can always make conversation interesting to other people by talking to them about themselves) ; and sometimes

I would give Virginia an opportunity of expanding, sometimes I would draw Bobbie out.

With him it was always his public position that I emphasized, telling him that he ought to attend the House of Lords and make a career for himself in politics ; Virginia was at the age when a girl reads political novels and sees herself *influencing* people—I'd been through that in the days when I wanted to marry George Brentwood. . . . Oh, and, as I hope to be saved, this *new* generation was still reading *Marcella* ! . . . I encouraged her to think how she could influence Bobbie. Sometimes I turned the conversation on to Croxton and asked him whether he'd yet finished clearing the tunnel under the moat. . . . When he went off to look for a lost ball, I rhapsodized about Croxton to Virginia—with intervals of prayer that, when she was invited there, she wouldn't instantly feel the *oppression* which assails me whenever I go there. . . .

And, when I judged the time ripe, I used to gather them together, talk for a few minutes and then go into the house to fetch myself a hat or to scribble a note ; they got on so well without me that my return always seemed to be resented, and it wasn't long before Bobbie suggested that they should paddle up the Wargrave back-water for tea. He enquired whether I had any objection, and I asked if he was to be trusted.

"You can't upset a punt," he said.

"Drowning's not the only danger. . . . Bobbie, she's ^{not} a mere child ; will you promise not to say or hint anything that either of you will ever regret ? "

It was an ambiguous way of putting it, but I wanted to be ambiguous at the moment.

"I'm afraid you've rather a low opinion of me," said Bobbie with rather a red face. "I can assure you that I shall say nothing that I'd mind any man saying to my sister."

"She's such a sweet child," I said, "that you've been paying her rather more marked attention than perhaps you realize ; women see those things if men don't, especially other girls who are perhaps a little piqued at being overlooked themselves. I only want you not to say or do anything to *afficher* her."

"I can promise you that on my honour," said Bobbie very seriously.

He was *so* serious that I think he must have frozen any kind of conversation between them, for, when they returned, it was quite obvious that nothing had happened. They went off again next day, and, when nothing happened this time either, I thought I'd give Virginia a little push from behind.

"Your mother said you wouldn't mind my giving you a little hint from time to time," I began. "Well, I'm going to hand on some advice that was given me when I was even younger than you are. All your life you'll spend a portion of every year staying in other people's houses; you'd like to feel you were being a success, and you'll find that it pays to *share* yourself. A little time with your host, a little with your hostess, a little with each of the guests; find out what their subjects are, talk to them as intelligently as you can and never, *never* yield to the temptation of running away from a bore. Some girls spend the whole of a house-party together, either in the hopes of tantalizing the men or because they're too lazy or indifferent to take trouble; others *only* shew vitality when they're surrounded by men, and they think they're enjoying such a triumph that they don't care if they make an army of enemies among the other women; and almost all of the present generation ignore the existence of their hostess and are surprised when they're not invited again. If you share yourself impartially, you can still have the greatest of all successes; and you'll make a friend of everybody instead of a *possible* slave of one."

Virginia looked at me in amazement.

"D'you mean that I'm giving too much time to Lord Pentyre?" she asked. "I only went on the river with him because he can't play tennis and I thought you wanted to write. That's *soon* remedied: I won't go on with him again!"

"My dear, I didn't mean that at all," I said. "I only *didn't* want you to make other girls critical."

"There's only one other girl," Virginia interrupted. "Leila's welcome to him so far as I'm concerned."

"My dear, you speak as if I were attacking you! I

only wanted to say that Lord Pentyre's such a very big match for any one that he can't help attracting attention. I assure you on my honour that nothing's been said—at least, to *me*—I only want to make certain that nothing *is* said. . . . On no account drop him suddenly, or people will think you've been snubbed; but protect yourself in the only safe way—by sharing yourself."

5

I don't know how much Virginia understood; and I felt that I was expressing myself very badly, but they had only two more days together, and I felt they'd never have such an opportunity again. The immediate result of my advice was that she insisted on playing tennis all next day and left me to deal with Bobbie and his ill humour. Next morning she wrote letters and, in the afternoon, played tennis again; I'd always *suspected* bad temper, but this was the first time she'd shewn it: the *one* child, over-indulged, couldn't tolerate criticism or even a hint that she wasn't perfect. . . . It was only when she ought to have been thinking about going in to dress for dinner that she consented to go out with him.

They were so late in coming back that we had to sit down without them. Half-past eight, nine, half-past nine! We all said in turns: "What *can* have happened to them?"; and that idiotic Leila murmured: "I do *hope* there hasn't been an accident." Accident indeed! They could both swim, and, as Bobbie had said, you can't upset a punt. No, it was quite clear to me what was happening, but I somehow wished it had happened at another time; it's so dreadfully awkward when a man has to come out of the dark into a room full of people and lights, *knowing* that every one's staring and wondering. . . . I hoped he'd have the sense to send Virginia to her room and ask me for a word in the hall so that I could break the news.

At *last* we heard them come in—at a quarter-past ten! Virginia ran upstairs, and I hurried into the hall.

"What *have* you been doing?" I asked.

"I hope we didn't give you the most awful fright," said Bobbie casually. "Are we too late to snatch a bite of food? We've had no dinner. . . . If you'll shew you forgive us by coming in and talking to us while we eat, I'll tell you the whole story. I think it's the *most* ridiculous thing that's ever happened; and it was my fault entirely; I'd put half the blame on Miss Burnley, if I could, but it's impossible." . . .

Now, I flatter myself that I know when a man or woman's talking to gain time. Bobbie was a little too fluent, a little too emphatic and shrill: "the *most* ridiculous thing," "my fault *entirely*". He evidently didn't want to say anything while we were in earshot of the others. . . I managed to have a good look at him, but Bobbie isn't a boy and he isn't a fool; a man like that can be a perfect sphinx if he chooses, and I only saw that he looked rather tired and white, which wasn't surprising as he'd had nothing to eat since lunch. I had a look at Virginia when she came down, but there was nothing to be learnt there except that she was probably tired and hungry too. We went into the dining-room.

"Shall I tell her or will you?" asked Bobbie, as we sat down. "Well, we paddled up the back-water as far as the *George* at Wargrave and then came out into the main stream. Here was fault number one: I'd entirely forgotten how late we were in starting, and by then it was dinner-time. We held a council of war: should we come back to Shiplake by train, should we dine in Wargrave, or should we telephone to say we should be late and then paddle back as fast as we could? Well, we found there wasn't a train for half-an-hour, and we agreed that we might both have our knuckles rapped by you if I took Miss Burnley out to dinner unchaperoned, so the only thing was to paddle down-stream for dear life and throw ourselves on your mercy. Here came fault number two: when the council of war broke up, we were in such a hurry to start that I quite forgot to telephone, and, by the time I remembered, it was too late to go back. So far just ordinary blundering, you see; the real insanity came later." . . .

I'd decided *long* before he reached this point that I wasn't going to hear the truth. Probably Virginia had asked for time or told him that she couldn't give him his answer till she'd seen her father. . . . They had evidently rehearsed their story in great detail and were going to tell me nothing; I noticed that she was always "Miss Burnley." . . .

"Well," Bobbie went on, "Miss Burnley had paddled me up-stream—as you know, I never like to butt in till the hard work's over—, so I said it was now my turn. There was only one paddle, which was the first fault of all, and I possessed myself of it. Off we went, with a strong stream running, no end of a pace; I never knew before that I could paddle like that. Alas, for the pride that comes before a fall! I was cutting a corner rather fine and I caught my paddle in some rushes; on we glided, hoping that the paddle would work free and drift down to us, but it seemed to have struck up an attachment with the rushes. There was a pole, of course; but Miss Burnley had never punted in her life, and I wasn't going to let her begin now; if I'd tried to use it myself, this old knee would have given, and I should have followed the paddle into the water. So we drifted on, praying for a friendly boat to help us out of our difficulties. I need *hardly* tell you that the river was completely and absolutely deserted; and we should still be drifting if Miss Burnley hadn't conceived the happy thought of landing. By using the pole as a rudder I managed to turn the punt out of mid-stream, and at last we reached the shore; after towing for about two hundred yards alongside water-logged meadows, we found a creek where we could tie up; we then struck inland and here we are."

And that was all. I didn't believe a word of the story and I don't even know if they intended me to believe it; the important thing was that it provided an explanation of some kind. . . . I was convinced that they had never been farther than the mouth of the back-water; they'd sat there talking and talking until it was necessary to make up *some* story; and then they'd just hidden the paddles. . . .

"Well, I'm thankful it's no worse," I said. "We were getting very much alarmed. Let me see how wet you are," I said to Virginia; "I know what those meadows are like."

"Oh, I changed my shoes and stockings when I came in," she told me, pointing to her feet.

I stayed a little while longer and then said I must go back to the drawing-room and explain what had happened. *They* weren't going to tell me anything more, and I couldn't deduce anything from their manner; but I resolved to have a good talk with Virginia upstairs. When he'd finished his supper, Bobbie came in, saying that Miss Burnley felt rather tired and had gone to bed. This gave me my opportunity even before I expected it.

When I went into her room, Virginia was staring out of window and swinging the blind-cord. She hadn't begun to undress, though her hat was on the bed where she'd put it before supper; and the first thing I noticed—because I was on the look-out for it—was that there was no sign of the shoes and stockings she was supposed to have changed. Well, I now had *no* doubt that the whole story was a fabrication, and this gave me my cue.

"I just came up to see that you hadn't taken cold," I said. . . . "Virginia, *did* you change your shoes?"

She looked at her feet and then at me—dully, as if she only half realized what I was saying.

"No," she answered; and then, as I was waiting for something more: "It would have spoilt Lord Pentyre's story about the water-logged meadows if I hadn't pretended my feet were wet."

"Then do you mean to say," I asked, "that all that was *made up*?"

She looked at me with the same dull listlessness, not in the least embarrassed at being caught out in a lie.

"Most of it," she answered. "We did hide the paddles and leave the punt in a little creek; and we made up the story as we came home from the back-water. As Lord Pentyre said, you'd expect *some* explanation."

I turned the key in the door and looked round for a chair.

"As indeed I do," I told her rather stiffly. "If this

story's untrue, I should like to know what you were up to all that time."

"We were talking," said Virginia shortly.

"You have plenty of opportunities for talking without staying out till after ten and frightening us out of our lives."

"I didn't mean to frighten you," she said wearily and without the least note of regret. "And I didn't want to stay out all that time, but Lord Pentyre had so much to say that it seemed better to let him finish. If you want to know, he asked me to marry him."

"Virginia! What did you say?"

"I told him I couldn't, but he wouldn't take that for an answer. I had to tell him again. . . . And again and again and again and again," she went on, suddenly losing all the dull calm and clapping her hands to her eyes. "My head's bursting! I shall go mad if you don't leave me alone!"

I said nothing. . . . After a time I made her sit down and helped her to undress; she submitted—without any word or sign of gratitude—; and, when I put her to bed and kissed her, she submitted again—without any hint of resentment.

"My dear," I said, "this is far too important for us to discuss when you're tired and distressed, but you've taken a very big decision. Bobbie Pentyre would be considered a great match for almost any girl——"

"But that doesn't matter if I'm not in love with him," interrupted Virginia.

"Aren't you a little young to say so quickly and positively whether you're in love or not?" I asked. "You need time for reflection; this is a thing on which you would be very wrong not to take the opinion and advice of your parents. When an offer of this kind is made to you by a man you've not known very long, you're quite entitled to say that you want time to think over it; perhaps it isn't too late yet for one of us—me, if you like—to drop him a little hint and to say you were taken by surprise and that when you've had leisure to talk it over with your parents . . ."

It was so *essential* that she shouldn't end everything then and there! A word to the Burnleys, and they'd *argue* her into it!

"I don't want any leisure," said Virginia, "to know that I'm not in love with Lord Pentyre."

"Before you know whether you're in love or not," I retorted, "you must know what love is."

"I do," she said.

And then she implored me to turn out the light and let her go to sleep. . . .

CHAPTER TEN

I

THE moment I was called next day, I gave orders that Virginia's breakfast was to be brought her in bed. Embarrassment apart, I was resolved that she and Bobbie should not meet until I had talked to her. . . .

A slight headache, I said, she was suffering from.

Bobbie . . . I *admired* the way he behaved ; his breeding. Not a sign, not a hint ; perfectly collected ; in excellent spirits, you'd fancy ; and never giving himself away by a fraction of an inch !

"I do hope I didn't give her a chill," he said with a most admirable choice of tone : just enough concern for politeness, just enough conventionality to make every one think that he was only *being* polite and didn't really care if he gave her double pneumonia.

"I don't think so," I answered lightly ; but, when breakfast was over, I went out into the garden with him and told him that I didn't think he'd been quite straightforward with me. "All that story about losing your paddle . . . Virginia has confessed that there wasn't a word of truth in it."

"It's what we agreed to say," he replied calmly. "However, I'm not proud : if there's any story she prefers, I'll back her up."

"She has certainly told me another story, which surprised me very much."

"I don't know why you should be surprised," said Bobbie with just enough stiffness to make me think he felt rather guilty. "We had a sort of bargain, didn't we ? You said Virginia was only just out of the school-

room, or something of the kind; and I promised that I'd say nothing to her that I'd mind any man saying to my sister. I kept my promise. . . . You say you're very much *surprised*," he went on wonderingly. "I told you a good thumping lie yesterday evening and I'm afraid I'm not in the least ashamed of it, as it was the only way of keeping the secret. How much Virginia has told you . . ."

We were on the side of the house away from her windows, and I took him by the arm. Until I'd broken down his hostility, he wouldn't *let* me help him.

"My dear, you speak as if I were blaming you," I said. "Virginia's told me everything; and, if I'm surprised, it's because—for the moment—she's lost her head. Blame? The *worst* I can say of you is that you've gone at it a little bit like a bull at a gate. . . . But that's all past! I only want you to say, Bobbie dear, if you think a woman can help you." He said nothing—which was all I wanted; and I gave his arm a little squeeze. "You're in earnest about her?"

"I don't propose to people for practice," he snapped.

"But I wonder if you can imagine how a girl is thrown off her feet by her first proposal!" I said. "She was frightened out of her life, wasn't she? Bewildered, until she didn't know what she was saying?"

"She said it very definitely. *More* than once. . . . If I'd asked her to run away with me, she couldn't have been more decided. Well, that's all in the day's work," he went on with an attempt at a yawn. "My *grouse*—for what it's worth—is that she never gave a feller the slightest indication beforehand; *I* thought it was a straight deal. I remembered what you'd said about the child from the nursery, so I went at it without skirmishing; she didn't *seem* the scalp-hunting variety. . . . Then to be told, to be *begged* not to say another word if I had the least regard for her! I felt that girls must be taught a lot in their nurseries nowadays."

He didn't *mean* to be bitter; but he was hurt right through, and it was a point of honour not to let me see that he really minded. . . . I had to take myself in hand, for a word of sympathy too much or too little would have

set such a gulf between us that I could never bridge it. . . . I became entirely detached and businesslike. . . .

"*Facts!*" I said. "You say you're in earnest; and she *implored* you not to say another word. That you can discount, ignore! A child; her first proposal. . . . You suggest that she'd led you to become fairly confident before you said anything?"

"That may have been just her 'childishness'," Bobbie sneered. "You've seen us together, heard us talking; if that was the academic interest of the nursery, I say no more."

Really and truly, she *hadn't* committed herself very much; but, when Bobbie and I talked about politics, she nodded and chipped in just enough to make a man think that his career was the most important thing in the world to her; when he described Croxton to her, she followed it all intelligently enough to make him think she was glamourised and to suggest a little picture of her as the admiring, adoring child-*châteline*. Bobbie's only a little over thirty; but, when a man has pursued light loves in the portals for ten or fifteen years, he wants some one extraordinarily dependable for his wife; and, if he has always associated with hard, worldly types like Sally Farwell or Barbara Neave, he begins to think that he's only safe with a girl so young that she hasn't found time to have her innocence brushed off by contact with life. Half Virginia's attraction, I'm sure, was her sheer youth. . . .

"I've seen you," I said. "I had no doubt; I have no doubt now. A woman doesn't always mean 'no,' when she says 'no'; at Virginia's age, she means 'yes' or 'I don't know' or anything else; and what she means we have to find out. I shall talk to Virginia——"

"I must ask you not to do that," he interrupted.

"Then you can't care for her very much," I said, "if you're discouraged at the first check; you'll make me think it's your pride and not your heart that's concerned. I shall talk to her; and you should talk to her father. This isn't a week-end flirtation where people decide to get married because they've nothing else to talk about or because it seems an adventure; this is an important

alliance and you should formally ask Mr. Burnley's leave to pay your addresses to his daughter. Really, Bobbie, I have a better sense of your position than you have."

I *knew* that line would succeed with the father; and, if Bobbie had failed for the moment with Virginia, it was only because he'd not played his cards well. . . . If you know Bobbie, you can *imagine* his style of proposing: "Well, old thing, what about it?" "What about what?" "What about entering for the St. George's Stakes?" Can you *wonder* if a girl like Virginia is bewildered? The surprise; then the bathos and vulgarity . . . to some one incurably romantic. By the time he began to talk seriously the harm was done. . . . If Bobbie had enlisted the *parents'* sympathy in the first place . . . though, of course, there was plenty of time still . . .

"Rather late in the day to see Burnley, isn't it?" he asked with a disagreeable laugh. "What should I say? 'I've paid my addresses to your daughter *without* asking your leave; now that she's turned me down, I should like your help in coercing her'. . . . Not good enough! Before I see the old man, I must have some assurance from Virginia that the 'surprised-child-from-the-nursery' business is over."

And with that he said something about having left his pipe indoors and disappeared.

I waited . . . and then went to Virginia's room. The door was locked, but I *made* her open it; and there I found her and her maid packing for dear life. She *had* to be in London by lunch-time, she told me. . . . I sent the maid out of the room, and for an *hour* we argued. She would give no reason except that she wasn't in love with Bobbie. Had she heard anything against him? Oh, well, he was probably no worse than other men; she didn't know, she didn't care.

"*Then*," I said, "why did you behave as you did? Why did you lead him on and encourage him to think that you cared for him? You're very young and—you must allow me to say—very ignorant and headstrong; much is forgiven to youth, but you can't behave like this and upset other people's houses with impunity."

It was the last shot in my locker! An attack *might* break her down, or it might simply infuriate her to the point where she refused to speak. We had an *appalling* scene! Virginia protested, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, that she *hadn't* led him on, that she had no idea he ever dreamt of proposing. . . . Well, I was almost convinced. But, if she *was* such a child, I couldn't understand her obstinacy: she refused to be glamourised, she refused to be shaken; when I told her that not only Bobbie alone but Peter and Leila, the very servants in the house, had seen her at work—oh, you may be sure I didn't spare her!—, she burst into a fresh flood of tears and said that we were all hateful, but she didn't believe me, I couldn't make her ashamed of herself. . . .

I suppose I drove her too far. . . . There came a moment when I seemed to get below Virginia Burnley, below the girl, almost below the human being to some primitive, blind force that fought with tooth and claw for its existence. . . . Extraordinary! I haven't many days to remember anything, but I feel that will be almost the last thing I shall forget. The blind, primitive *me* was fighting as hard; I'd been scheming and contriving for months, but this was the first time that we'd both thrown off all pretence. And we fought with conventional phrases, with voices that became excited but never harsh or ill-bred. Oh no!

"You can't *make* me marry him if I don't want to," cried Virginia defiantly.

I made gestures and noises of reasonableness, smiling ever so patiently, drying her eyes. She knew I was fighting to keep Spenser from her, but perhaps she didn't yet know that I was fighting to keep him for myself; I couldn't afford to make her a present of that.

"Darling child, I only want you *not* to throw away the chance of happiness with a man who adores you, a man who will give you a great position and a wonderful life. No one can force you to marry any one against your will."

"You couldn't try harder if you wanted to get rid of me at all costs!" Did I say that our voices never became

ill-bred? Perhaps Virginia *rather* overstepped the limit there; it wasn't tactful to shew me how well she knew my motives; after that we could *hardly* pretend that we weren't fighting to the death for the same man. She saw her mistake and tried to repair it by muttering: "If I were a hunchback and you *had* to get me married to the first man who would take pity on me . . ."

The recovery came too late, for we'd bared our teeth. She hated me for all I'd done, all I still meant, all the little hold I still retained on Spenser (it was my one consolation: so long as she hated me for that, she was frightened of me).

And I hated her for every day of the twenty-five years that separated us. Wild beasts in serge skirts and jumpers, wild beasts in silk stockings and white shoes, wild beasts with bare arms and necks, sizing each other up. . . . I had the straighter back and slighter figure; I had better hands and feet. Little fool! When she allowed me to undress her the night before, I'd seen hard little muscles and what she'd like to think a "natural" waist; she might outlast me at tennis, but she'd begin to spread before she was thirty . . . and she'd burnt her arms and neck copper-coloured. . . .

Meanwhile she was looking at me and noticing two hollows in my neck above the collar-bone; I might have better hands, but the skin was harder, and they were always cold. . . . I don't suppose she troubled to analyse any farther; if she pictured us side by side with our hands outstretched to Spenser, *she* knew which he'd choose, *she'd* not forgotten the night when they stood locked in each other's arms until she reeled away from him. Why was she afraid?

Well, she had his gratitude to overcome; and it hadn't occurred to her that she could blot it from his mind by giving a hundred times more than I could afford, buying him body and soul; and she had to master or get round my knowledge, my experience, my understanding. One face against another, I should have won with any man who needs intelligence before he admits beauty; Virginia was still a child, a doll, the eternal mistress—and I was

the eternal wife. At that moment I wouldn't have touched her face, because I didn't fear it ; but I would have given my life to take away the softness and whiteness and warmth of her body, to shrivel it until men turned away in disgust.

And she . . . ? I expect she was thinking that only her body mattered at present and that she could begin to look intelligent later. . . .

" Virginia, how absurd we are ! " I cried. " It's my fault for talking to you when you're upset. I'm upset myself, because I *don't* think you're behaving wisely (but we won't discuss that again) ; and I'm upset over poor Bobbie, who's terribly unhappy. If you say it can't be helped, we won't have another word on the subject. If he thinks you gave him any encouragement, he must continue to think so ; I confess I was rather quoting him and I reproached you a little bit because no girl can afford to have that sort of thing said about her. Will you believe that I've only been trying to think what was best for you ? I'm disappointed, because I think it would be a splendid match for you ; and your parents will be disappointed too ; but, when you tell me that you're certain of your own feelings, it would be mistaken zeal for me to urge you."

And then I kissed her. And I felt her drawing back. . . .

I knew she wasn't deceived ; but I had in some way to end the scene ; she was my guest, and we *had* to keep up an appearance of friendship. A mean, weak surrender in which I did all the apologizing and she hardly cared whether I apologized or not. I remember at the time wondering why I did it ; and, when she'd gone, I saw that I was instinctively preparing a place for my last leap : I'd failed with her, I'd failed with Bobbie, I couldn't put pressure on the father ; but I had a fair field with Spenser if I didn't make her so desperate that she contrived to set him against me.

When she realized that he might be bought, my last hope was gone. But she knew nothing of money beyond her dress allowance, she had no imagination ; in her mad realm of pure love she'd have felt dishonoured if the devil had whispered to her that she could offer Spenser a bigger

price for himself than I could give. Influence to help him into the Foreign Office, and a pittance when he got there: that was my maximum bid; she could afford not to begin bidding until I'd reached my limit. . . .

No, I didn't deceive her; and, though we seemed to part friends, she didn't send me even a line of insincere thanks. I thought it very youthful of her to shew her hand so plainly . . . until I remembered that I'd shewn mine, that all this diplomacy and make-believe were good enough against men, but that we were animals that had snarled and sprung and broken free and were waiting to spring again—this time *not* to break free. . . .

2

I didn't see Spenser till the beginning of September; and I hardly heard from him. A line from Dorsetshire and another from Kent. . . .

In that time I lost all self-control and went quite mad. . . . I suppose I'd always lived so much on my nerves that I couldn't stand any extra strain; and twenty years of stimulants leave their mark on your recuperative powers. I was haunted so persistently by the vision of that wrangle with Virginia that, although my brain told me that she was nothing to Spenser, I behaved as though she'd already won the battle. There's a heart-breaking pathos in the despairing efforts that we make when we're mad and know we're mad . . . and yet go on struggling. Into this light, tossing scale which I had somehow to set against Virginia's—with its cruel burden of youth—I flung experience, position, influence . . . as though it were minted money and I an old man buying the embraces of an indifferent slave. "Think what you can *do* with it, Spenser!" I kept whispering to myself. "Think what I can make of you." . . .

A *rich* old man, suddenly humbled at finding that his money isn't legal tender. . . . Oh, it's a splendid parallel, for I wanted to buy Spenser's youth and strength; I wanted to be gripped in his arms; I wanted—just once—

to be loved. . . . Strange, isn't it, Ada, my placid, *satisfied*, respectable mother-of-three? Just as strange when a hungry man is maddened by the smell of food until he thieves and kills! Just as strange when a drowning man stares up, with bursting lungs and crashing heart, through a green waste of dim water for air and light . . . just one gulp of air before he drowns! *Hunger* has never come into your life, Ada. . . .

I sat up and *begged* before Spenser: all my arts and graces, all my little tricks. . . . He wrote in wild excitement to say that the Brickdales had two Knellers and a Sir Joshua in their dining-room. I wrote back that I'd been taken to see them when I was staying with the Pontefracts; if he cared for Knellers—which I didn't—, he must come and stay with me at Cresley; Feo Burchester was always asking when I was coming again, and I *knew* she'd let me invite any one. . . . "Let that sink in, Master Spenser," I said to myself; "you're young enough to be impressed by duchesses for many a long year to come, but you'll never set foot inside Cresley until *I* introduce you." I boomed myself steadily during those weeks and left him to draw his own conclusions; Virginia had nearly missed being presented that year, because the Burnleys couldn't think of any one to undertake it. . . . And I didn't let him forget all that I was doing for him; the trip to Venice was kept well to the front in our correspondence.

He arrived from Herefordshire with his mother two days before we were due to start. I *shewed* nothing; but on the journey out there I led him to talk about himself and the houses he'd been stopping in; you learn far more by the *amount* a man talks about a woman than by what he says; men think that, so long as they're not too enthusiastic, no one notices if they keep coming back and back to the same subject. Spenser . . . I was rather puzzled, because he hardly mentioned her, though he was very full of the house that her father had taken for the summer; he didn't write to her, so far as I know, and she certainly didn't write to him, because I always collected all the letters from the office.

I wondered if I had anything to fear. He was just as he'd been at the Commemoration ball; and I'd decided then that it was Virginia who was hunting him. For the first time since my scene with her, I felt safe, happy! She was hunting him still, but I could not see that she was any nearer catching him!

I wondered whether *I* was. . . .

At first I told myself that I mustn't hurry him; then I saw that I was shirking a difficulty and that, for the present at least, I had no *means* of hurrying him. It wasn't long before I realized that I couldn't afford to wait: I was within a few months of forty-five; and, if Spenser wasn't in love with either of us yet, that was no guarantee that he wouldn't fall in love with some one else. In a moment my sense of safety, my happiness evaporated; I can't describe my dismay when I thought of having to fight for him against yet *another* woman: so far I had concentrated all my antagonism on Virginia and I suddenly discovered that I was too old, too tired, too inelastic to fight any one else. There was an American girl in our hotel who was always making up expeditions and trying to include Spenser: bathing parties for the Lido. . . . I developed a sore throat and carried him off to Como a week before the time we'd meant to leave. . . .

He'd been charming in Venice—he was *always* charming—, and at Como we were like young lovers. Brain and brain, soul and soul. . . . I've never been nearer to a living creature . . . and yet we were always held back, I never went to his head as I prayed God night and day that I might. Always some restraint, something wanting. . . . If I'd been able to forget the night when I saw him kissing Virginia, I should have said that he was not yet awakened; truthfully I could only tell myself that *I* had failed to wake him.

The days were racing by, and I had a fantastic idea that this was my last chance: Virginia had had him to herself for a fortnight in Scotland and she'd made nothing of her opportunity; good, it was now my turn, and I'd had him to myself for three weeks. . . . A ridiculous idea, but I felt in my bones that *somebody*, *something* had arranged

this contest between us and that, if we both failed, we should have to stand aside for some other woman. I seemed to have used up all my ammunition: there were no more variations to be played on the theme of what I'd done for him, what I could do for him in the future. He could see what I *was*: didn't I dress for him, talk for him, smile for him? He wasn't blind, he wasn't cold: when he kissed me, it was not the kiss of an indifferent boy.

But it wasn't the kiss of a lover. . . .

We returned a day or two before we'd intended. Julia's antiquarian wrote to say that he'd be very much obliged if she could curtail her holiday in order to help him with some unexpected work, and, though *she* didn't mind leaving us together, I let it be seen that I thought this quite out of the question. What did I care about two or three days more, when I'd failed, failed? And yet I was so desperately anxious not to fail that I insisted on keeping Spenser with me until he went back to Oxford. Joan had been living in the Chelsea house while her own was being decorated, and I told her that she could stay on and keep us company for a week; I arranged that we should have one or two parties and go to the play. *She* was too stupid to see that I was keeping her to chaperon me.

On the last day of the week she returned to St. John's Wood. I'd honestly miscalculated the date; and it was only when I came back to dress for dinner that I found her gone and Spenser still there. He said nothing at first; but, after dinner, he asked whether she wasn't coming back and then suggested that he should go and spend the night at an hotel. What could I say? He was practising what I preached, and of course I said that I was afraid it would be necessary, more especially as I had new servants who would naturally try to put a wrong construction on everything.

"I don't agree that it's necessary," said Spenser. "I never did, as you know; but, if you feel you'd be compromised, I'll clear out. Tell me when you'd like me to go."

He was vanishing to Oxford next morning. It was the last hour on the last day of my last chance! I wondered if I *dared* let him stay. First of all it was just that I wanted to go on talking to him; then I asked myself why he shouldn't be *made* to compromise me. He was afraid of the word, for all his sniffing. . . . And all men are afraid of being forced into "a false position" until they are old enough to know how to get out of it. The ideas were rushing into my head so fast that I wanted to call out and tell them to wait until I could assimilate them one by one. *Could* I carry it off? Was I actress enough? Should I be able to stand up to him and convince him that I was compromised if he said: "Don't be ridiculous! Who cares *what* servants say? You can tell them that I've stayed here alone with you since I was a child. If they don't believe it, you can bring witnesses, but *why* pay any attention to servants'-hall gossip?" Could I stand up to that, overcome it, prevail on him?

A flimsy chance, but it *was* a chance. . . .

"I'm *sure* Joan said originally that she was staying till to-morrow," I murmured to gain time. Then I looked at the clock and the fire and the window. "I *can't* turn you into the street. We mustn't be so careless another time, but to-night I think we'll risk it. Our last night! I shall miss you terribly, Spenser; I always do."

"I wish it wasn't the end of the vac.," he answered. "It's time I began to do a little work, though."

He began to talk about his schools. . . . And I felt that, if I hadn't been there, he'd have talked to the fire-place! *That* was all I mattered to him just then, when he was thinking of his friends and the coming term! And I'd thought I could make him fancy that he'd imperilled my reputation and must atone for it! He wouldn't have understood what I meant, he'd have thought I was joking. . . . Somehow—I don't know when I began to think of it—I saw that I could only get a hold on him by making him my lover in earnest.

I looked at him . . . and shivered! Twenty years ago, fifteen, it was my business to attract men. They weren't content then with the intellectual companionship that

I was so anxious to give them ; that might be the permanent basis of marriage, but first they wanted some one who was woman and lover, some one who mystified and inflamed them. I learnt that. . . . First my Spenser. I made him fall in love with me until he had to throw me over or go mad ; and George Brentwood, who came day after day, pleading and humbling himself until his nerves broke down and he sobbed as though his heart would burst ; and Martin . . . I let Martin go because he disgusted me, but I'd won him against his will and I could have kept him.

Twenty years ago I knew the changes in men's voices . . . and how to bring them there ; I knew the tentative little glances, which I wasn't meant to see, when it first occurred to them that I might be worth while, and the bold, possessive stare when they saw that I had good arms and shoulders, good skin and hair, that I *was* worth while. They watched me as I sat and as I moved, guessing at me and stripping me in their imagination ; and I made myself mysterious and unattainable ; and, when they were in despair, there was a glance, a touch that made them think they had attained me ; then mystery again. . . .

These little fools of to-day with their transparencies and nakedness, what do they know of mystery ? If a man wants them to dine and dance, hour after hour, night after night, do they refuse, do they keep him waiting or uncertain, do they pretend to be cold, do they set any price on themselves ? You know well that, if he doesn't ask them, they'll ask themselves ! The mystery of clothes—they wear none ! The excitement of a stolen moment when they're alone together—they're alone together the whole time now !

What is there left when they tear aside every veil and yield every gift before it's asked for or wanted ? Names, endearments, the shy surrender of tiny intimacies, the whole art of love—what do these fools know about it, when every one is " darling " and " poor sweet " to them, when they *force* a man to use their Christian names and are insulted if he doesn't try to kiss them ? They've

nothing more to give and, if they marry, they wonder why both are so bitterly disappointed. I've had men in love with me; I *know*. And I made them fall in love with me, I could keep them. . . .

Twenty years ago. . . . But I *didn't* want to make such an effort! I was hungry as I'd never been before, but I was desperately tired. . . . The old actor returning to the stage. . . . I'd lost confidence; and I'd never tried to capture a boy like this. God! if he shewed by word or look that I was old enough to be his mother! If he *laughed*! And I had so *nearly* been his mother, if he only knew. . . .

3

What I said that night, what I did . . .

It wouldn't give me any relief to describe it, Ada, and relief is all I care about now: air, the power to breathe after all these years of repression. You pretend to be glad! *You would*! Little hypocrite, I'm dying, I shan't give you away; can't you be honest with me for a moment? You *want* to hear, to be thrilled, to gloat; sex was the business of your life ever since you became a woman, you've thought sex, dreamt sex, talked sex; it won't let you alone, you can't escape it. But you pretend it's not decent to talk about it—as though every word you speak, every movement of your body wasn't inspired by sex. Indecent to want air in your lungs! But I'll respect your pretence. What does it matter now? I set myself to win Spenser, I laid a spell upon him: he was *mine*, if I cared to take him. And then—I don't know why—he escaped, I let him go. . . .

Perhaps, when I realized my power, I was afraid to give him any chance of too soon tiring of me; perhaps there was a moment when I saw another, rival light and asked myself what *I* should think of a horrible old woman who tried to steal *my* son. I don't know. . . . Quite clearly I remember an instant's hesitation, slackening, doubt: was it worth it, was it possible, was it tolerable? And, as I began to doubt, he doubted too; his expression

changed; he was sane once more, wondering what had sent him mad.

Sane—and apologetic, as though he'd attacked and insulted me.

"My God! What must you think of me?" he whispered. "I can never look you in the face after this."

"Perhaps I understand," I told him.

And he fancied he knew the strength of love!

"What—what did I say?" he stammered.

"My dear, it was nothing," I answered. "We were talking about your going to an hotel, and you said: '*Let me stay! I will stay! I must stay*'; and, without giving me a chance to get in a word (though I'd *said* you might stay), you became rather violent. . . . Don't worry, don't think about it!"

"Anything might have happened!" he whispered.

"I can take care of myself," I said.

"But what did I say?" he persisted.

"You wanted to be my lover——"

"For Christ's sake forget it!" cried Spenser. "And forgive me!"

He buried his face in his hands. . . . When I tried to comfort him, he began to sob.

"You're surprised that I'm not furious with you," I said. "Why should I be? . . . That sounds very wicked to you, I suppose, but who would be injured? . . . I'm a woman alone in the world, responsible to no one, without a husband to consider; and you're as independent as I am, free in every way." . . . I waited . . . and then forced a little laugh. "You can see I had no reason to be angry."

Curious! . . . Spenser was fading from me like the memory of a man that I'd embraced in a dream; and it was I who had let him go. . . . As he went, I strained myself to recapture him; and he felt my will travelling towards him like an electric wave, I saw him weakening. . . .

"It would be wrong," he said.

"Wrong to love?" I asked. "If we were man and woman alone in the world, loving each other, if neither of us had heard of churches and schools . . . If it's

wrong, it became wrong before the time of Adam and Eve."

He shook his head. . . . I put my hands on his shoulders and made him look at me, but he looked down again at once.

"It would be wrong," he repeated.

"Why? Dear child, I only want to know what's going on in your funny little head."

"I don't know. . . . Perhaps it's because we aren't alone in the world. If you married again afterwards——"

"I've had one husband," I reminded him.

"If *I* married," he said . . . and stopped.

"It isn't the same for men and women," I said.

"It ought to be. In the perfect marriage it *must* be!"

"Then there are no perfect marriages," I told him. He didn't believe me, but he said nothing. "A woman," I went on, "would sooner think that all other women had been weighed and found wanting before you came to her than that none had been even weighed."

"Not all," he said.

"Darling Spenser!" I cried, "what do you know of women?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all!" he answered. "I know a little, a very little about one; and I'm certain that isn't true of her."

I'll swear I gave no sign! "Her" . . . Not "you." So my little Spenser *had* a romance, an ideal; and he was afraid to look at me for fear I should spoil it. . . .

"At your age . . . I suppose *I* thought that," I said. "I've found it isn't true. A woman can be content with one man, but a man was never intended to be content with one woman. And, so far as there's any secret of life, *that's* the secret of all the unhappiness and muddle and tragedy of life. . . . As you'll find. . . Darling boy, don't think me cynical! I love you so dearly that I want to help you with all my advice and experience. Are you in love?"

I watched him flushing, watched his eyes growing soft and moist. . . .

"I suppose I am," he answered.

"Promise me you won't do anything without consulting me," I begged. "I'm older *and* wiser."

"Of course I won't," he promised.

Older His mother, his grandmother couldn't have given him a more maternal kiss. Then I sent him to bed. It was only ten o'clock, but I had to send out invitations for a party. . . .

He went back to Oxford without saying good-bye. . . . I breakfasted in my room as usual, and he could have come in if he'd wanted to ; but no ! When I came down, he had left by a needlessly early train, and I heard nothing till he sent me an effusive letter of thanks for the *wonderful* time I'd given him at Shiplake and in Italy and London. He'd changed his rooms and was very full of ideas about carpets and curtains and pickling the paint off his sitting-room panels ; I *must* come up and see them. . . .

He was young enough not to know how to carry off a meeting, ignorant enough to fancy that he made it easier by postponing it. I was ready enough to face him, for he was convinced that everything was his fault : when I tried to cast a new spell over him, he imagined that I was only finding excuses for him. I remember wondering how much knowledge of life and of women he would have to acquire before he reasoned backwards and saw through me. . . .

I wasn't sorry to be spared a meeting. When I tried to get up I felt as if every bone had been taken out of my body ; for months I had been tired and ill, with odd pains, but the excitement of the long duel had kept me alive, even though I told myself at times that victory wasn't worth such an effort, such exhaustion. Now that the strain was over, I suddenly collapsed. I can't tell you quite what I thought or believed, because, when I found Spenser gone, I went back to bed and tried to arouse a little courage, a little efficiency . . . in the old way ; and my nerves were so tattered that the brandy flung me into wild transports of optimism and then let me down with a reaction that made me pray for death.

"It's all over at last," I told myself: "you've shot your bolt, you're beaten, broken, useless."

Then I felt myself warming with the brandy; and I said: "Thank goodness it *is* all over, you couldn't have stood the strain much longer. Well, you've been through more than one crisis and you must pull yourself together. There are other things in life. You've given twenty years to carving yourself a niche like no other woman's in London; you're a personality and a great social figure; there's no one to equal you in your own line; and you'll be a coward and a fool if you throw it all away."

I was *ever* so valiant. . . .

Too valiant. . . . As the brandy took possession of me, I said it *wasn't* all over! Spenser *fancied* he was in love, but Virginia and he were children; her parents wouldn't dream of letting her marry yet, anything might happen; he hadn't a shilling of his own, and there was no reason why they should give him anything. His letter, so full of love and enthusiasm, came when I wanted just that encouragement; I told myself that he'd see his mistake and come to tell me all about it; every time the bell rang, I expected to hear that he'd come back; and I was reduced to looking out the trains from Oxford and calculating the time it would take him to drive from Paddington. . . .

After two days I worked through a regular cycle. Three or four hours' heavy, dreamless sleep; a wild restlessness that set me tingling and itching at about five or six; one second when I realized that some disaster had happened and wondered what it was; a sort of gasp, as though I'd plunged into a snow-drift, when I remembered; then an amazingly clear head and feverish energy! "It's all over," I said. "*Don't* think about it! Get to work!" And for hours I would write letters. . . .

Then the post came, telling me that Lady Poynter had *much* pleasure in accepting Mrs. Shelley's kind invitation . . . and I saw the ghastly futility of it all and asked myself how I could fancy for a moment that I could go on inviting third-rate novelists to meet tenth-rate literary snobs--myself the greatest snob of all, people were always saying!

"Yet it's all you have, so you must make the best of it," said the first brandy. "You can squeeze a phenomenal success out of it," added the second; "you've never failed yet." "As you've never failed yet," said the third, "you won't fail now with Spenser." . . .

I was always glad if I could go to sleep in that mood: any more brandy made me sentimental, maudlin; and I wrote long, passionate, reproachful letters—which I always had to tear up—for the very joy of feeling myself in communication with Spenser—dear God, just as his father had first written to me on the night after the Infirmary Ball. . . . It was best if I could go to sleep, propped up in bed, watching the door, waiting for him to come and *knowing* that he *would* come. . . .

I should be sitting there now if I hadn't sent out those invitations. They were an instinctive act of self-defence: I said to myself, as I'd said in every other crisis, "I have *this* left." The invitations—and the empty bottles! I told you that no one had ever seen me touch anything but water; I had so many people to the house that, when I opened the wine myself and slipped an extra brandy bottle in among the rest, none of my servants ever suspected. But now for days—I couldn't remember how many—I'd done no entertaining of any kind. The bottles were accumulating quicker than I could get rid of them. One morning I had to say to myself: "This must *stop*." . . .

I was supposed to be suffering from a chill; but, when I tried to get up, there seemed to be something really the matter with me. It wasn't what I'd been drinking—I'd been through all that before and, after the time when Spenser went to the front, I didn't fancy I had anything to learn about *that*—; it wasn't just weakness or shock; it was great discomfort that sometimes turned to acute pain. I sent for my doctor and had myself examined; he looked grave and said that he would like a second opinion; Penruddock came and diagnosed a growth which he "hoped" would not prove to be malignant; they both agreed that I ought to be operated on without loss of time.

A shock, that ; when I'd already had more than I thought any human being could bear. I said I would think about it. . . .

When Penruddock *advises* an operation, most people would say that he'd *ordered* it ; and he wasn't at all pleased to discover that I had a will of my own and would be operated on or not as I liked. When he'd gone, I talked to my own doctor and found that, while an operation would probably save me, I should get rapidly worse if I left the growth to take care of itself. I thanked him—and lay back to think it all over, all that I'd done, all that was left to me if I *did* trouble to get well.

I've told you the story of my life as I see it, Ada ; and you may believe that I saw it in vastly greater detail than I've given you, with denser, longer splashes of shade and perhaps a good deal less light than you'd imagine from the glimpses you've caught of me in my triumph. I didn't spare myself. First of all I painted a great picture of the position I'd won ; then I reckoned what I'd sacrificed to win it. "Was it worth *this* and *this* and *this* ?" I asked myself ; and, at the end of every chapter, when my foot seemed on a higher rung of the ladder, I had to say : "You'd have done better to stop, to turn back ; the ladder leads nowhere, and you're climbing it over the ruins of everything that you—the real, permanent you—care for."

I looked at my glittering picture again and *argued* with myself that it was worth all and more than all. And I wasn't convinced. . . . A thousand little memories *would* keep crowding into my mind : little vignettes of father, oh, years ago, before you were born, and then that last sight of him when he was dead. Mother had always seemed to make life at Hillcrest unbearable ; but I've since discovered that, wherever you go, there's always some one who seems to make life unbearable and that you must give up praying that the tiresome people will die, you must school yourself not to find them tiresome. When I remembered how father had loved us and slaved for

us, I said: "You might have been happy with him."

I thought of my old Spenser and the day when he came back from Switzerland and we walked from Headington into Mesopotamia. . . . North Oxford was so cramped and intolerable; but Chelsea, my own Chelsea would have been just as cramped if I hadn't created my own world in it. "You *would* have been happy with Spenser," I said. "There was love there, on both sides; even if he was fated to be killed, nothing could take away those first months. He would have left you a son to care for." . . .

That was what I had been trying to keep out of my thoughts. . . . I could argue that, by sacrificing father and Spenser, I had satisfied my ambitions and won my position, there was something to shew for it; but I had nothing to shew for refusing to bear children. They would have taken time and money; Martin soon became such a symbol of bestiality in my life that I hated to think of my children having a drop of his blood in their veins, hated to think I must share them with him. . . . And so I refused. And now I saw that, if I hadn't refused, nothing else would have mattered: I could have given up my ridiculous ambitions, I shouldn't now be breaking my heart for Spenser. . . .

I suddenly started up in bed and screamed:

"What have you got out of it all?"

And now, when I saw clearly, when it was too late, Sir Cornelius Penruddock *strongly* recommended an operation! . . . *to keep me alive!!*

For a few minutes I was quite hysterical: it was the accumulated reaction from all the brandy. . . . When I had contrived to compose myself, I said that I would let them keep me alive if I could convince myself that there was anything to live for: I would be ever so reasonable, ever so fair. . . . I telegraphed to tell Spenser that I was coming to Oxford next day and hoped that he could give me lunch. After that my weakness and pain seemed to vanish. Will-power Somehow, somewhere I'd found will-power to carry me through my last effort.

I drove straight from the station to his rooms. The scout, who was beginning to lay the table, told me that

Mr. Woodrow was out at a lecture but had left a message that I was to make myself at home. For the first time I tried to determine what I wanted to say, why I had come; yes, I, who never left anything to chance, had come unprepared, instinctively, as a dog swims to shore without asking himself whether he'll be beaten or shot when he gets there. I *tried* to think, but it was no good: the old scout kept popping in and out, bringing me the *Daily Mail*, banging plates and knives on to the table. . . . He was only laying for three; but, if it had been a Mansion House banquet, he couldn't have made more fuss, counting on his fingers and whispering "That's *one, two* . . . Another small knife." . . .

I gave it up and began to examine the rooms. Spenser, I knew, would expect me to take an interest in them; and I found it so hard to be interested in stained deal panels and green wool curtains and wicker arm-chairs and a revolving book-case with all the books I knew I should find there—Ernest Dowson and a Constitutional History and the University Statutes and a reprint of an early Wells; I could guess the others without looking at them; and I could guess that he'd have *The Bath of Psyche* and Whistler's mother as two of his pictures. . . .

There was a photograph on his writing-table; and I crossed the room as a snake glides to its prey—only to find that it was one of me! I dug fiercely among his papers, but these were only bills and notices of club meetings and his last week's battels: cutlets, *chaudfroid* of chicken, fruit jelly. . . . I sat down and told myself that I must be much more composed than this if I hoped to do any good. And *still* I didn't know what I was going to say. . . .

I heard a clock striking twelve; there was a sound of feet on the stairs, and Spenser burst in, tearing off his gown and flinging a note-book into the window-seat.

"Hope you've not been waiting long," he said. "You didn't tell me your train, or I'd have come to meet you. Virginie not here yet?"

Now I knew why three places were being laid But I didn't turn a hair; and I knew then that will-power

was going to carry me through. Virginia! I'd not seen her since Shiplake. And, though he'd written to me two days before, he'd never mentioned that she was coming. Coming alone, too, apparently. How she'd hate to find me there! . . . Unless she chose to fancy that I'd come to chaperon her. . . . Will-power wasn't making my brain work: I knew vaguely that I had to think something out, decide what I was going to say. . . . And I could only see myself making some effort that failed dismally, while Virginia smiled with supercilious triumph. . . .

"I didn't see her at the station," I told him.

"Oh, she's motoring herself up; but she's never here till one, even without breakdowns."

"You speak as if they were a common occurrence," I laughed.

"Well, she's smashed up three times out of five," said Spenser.

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I just thought of those battels on his writing-table: *I* was paying for the cutlets and chickens and jellies that he gave her! I was paying for the clothes he stood up in! . . . And then I saw that this gave me my cue.

"I hope you're not giving *too* much time to these little festivities," I said. "It's very important that you should do well in your schools and it's essential that you should have a good grounding for whatever comes afterwards. I want to have a serious talk with you."

Spenser looked a little uncomfortable, and I felt that he was putting himself on the defensive.

"About Virginia?" he asked. "I've been meaning to talk to you about her for a long time, but it was always so hard to begin."

I felt I *knew* what was coming; and I tried to have my counter-attack ready before he'd launched his attack. But I couldn't make my brain work. . . .

"Let me hear you first," I suggested.

Spenser turned very pink and fidgeted with a pipe before he could begin.

"Well, this is in absolute confidence," he said. "I haven't told mother yet and I really promised Virginie I

wouldn't tell any one. You remember asking me if I was in love? I told you I was. I promised, too, that I wouldn't do anything without consulting you; and I haven't. But Virginia and I are sort of engaged. I . . . I suppose it all really started the last time I was home on leave; then we drifted on until I went to stay with her in Scotland, and that was when we brought things to a head. Burnley's behaved very decently, on the whole: he says we're still much too young for him to recognize the engagement, but we may talk to him again when Virginie's of age and I'm earning my own living; in the meantime he says he'd rather we didn't write to each other and he's put us on our honour not to meet without his knowledge. I don't mind telling you that this seemed awfully hard at first, because I don't see her more than once a fortnight, and it's the very devil not being allowed to write; but he was so decent about the whole business that we felt we couldn't stand out against him. He says I can't attend to two things at once; and he used almost your words about doing well in the schools. . . So that's where we are."

Thank God, he didn't look at me! I had a *little* time to collect myself. . . .

"I think he's very wise," I said. "Indeed, I'm only rather surprised that he allowed you to consider yourselves engaged. Marriage is terribly serious, Spenser; you're both of you such children, and I at least can see so many objections——"

I hadn't meant to say it, but I couldn't hold myself in! Of course, Spenser was up in arms at once!

"What kind of objections?" he demanded.

"I may come to that later," I said. "Perhaps 'objections' is too strong a word. Oh, I promise you we'll thresh the whole thing out, but I want to tell you my own piece of news before Virginia comes; and this, too, is strictly between ourselves. It's not very good news, I'm afraid, but we have to face it, and I only ask you not to interrupt, not to sympathize. . . . I've not been very well lately, Spenser; I consulted a doctor, and he brought a specialist who said I must undergo an operation

immediately. Perhaps it will make me all right, perhaps it won't. As you know, I've had great plans for you ; and I felt it was only fair to warn you that, if anything happens to me, those plans will fall to the ground. I've never discussed my finances with you, but I may as well say that part of my income is derived from my father under his will and part from my marriage-settlement ; if I die without marrying again or having children, father's money goes to my sisters for their lives and then to their children ; and my husband's money back to his family ; I shall have nothing to leave any one but the lease of my house and the furniture and books. We'll hope that nothing's going to happen, but it wouldn't be kind not to warn you that you might at any moment have to say good-bye to Oxford." . . .

I was amazed at myself, for it all came by inspiration ! You know that father's money was left us unconditionally ! And I never had a marriage-settlement ; under Martin's will everything of his came to me, he hadn't a relation in the world. . . . I wanted Spenser to see how helpless he was without me—and how much I could do for him ! If he married me on my death-bed, he'd have a life-interest. . . . Or so I'd tell him.

And then there were more footsteps outside ; and Virginia came in before he could ask questions or be sympathetic. She threw open the door and ran at him. . . . And then she saw me, pulled back, fumbled with her veil, apologized for being late. That veil D'you remember my saying that we'd bared our teeth at each other ? And that this time we should hang on till one or other was dead ? Spenser only saw a girl in short skirt and brogues, with her cheeks pink from the wind, a little out of breath and rather confused at finding me there. . . .

I saw woman—young, tenacious, primitive, remorseless, ready to do battle for a man, a boy who wasn't worth it, but a boy who had somehow set us both on fire. Neither would let go ; and all other men were useless to us. She could have had her choice among thousands, in every street and college ; I could have gone to poor George

Brentwood, I suppose, and told him that I'd altered my mind. Love doesn't work like that, though. . . .

We smiled at each other, she and I, while we knew that, if either dropped dead, the other would kick and spit on the body. And Spenser waited for the kiss that she'd been frightened out of giving him and tried to look as if he hadn't forgotten in a moment all about my illness. . . .

Then there were more footsteps, and the old scout brought in lunch.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

I REMEMBER very little of that ghastly meal; I wish I could forget it all. Virginia began with some kind of prattle about her car and the narrow escape she'd had from a market-cart at Hounslow. I *think* she was trying to preserve appearances, to include me in the conversation, though all three of us were waiting to get to grips; and, when she asked if I'd come up by train, I seized my opportunity.

"Spenser didn't tell me you were going to be here," I said, "or I wouldn't have spoilt your party; and, if you've arranged to do anything this afternoon, you mustn't let me stand in the way. I had a very important matter of business and I planted myself on Spenser without giving him any time to put me off."

Of course Virginia wasn't to be outdone in civility! It was *her* turn now to apologize for interrupting our little business talk.

"We'd really finished, hadn't we?" asked Spenser. "You didn't want me to make any comment——"

"I'd told you my part," I said. "Perhaps, if Virginia will treat this as a secret, I might explain why I had to come up in all this hurry." And then I repeated to her what I'd told him, only adding to Spenser: "I want you to be *practical*. I'll take your sympathy for granted, but I want to know what you'll do if all our plans are suddenly upset, if you suddenly find that you have to set about earning your living."

I needn't tell you that he was helpless; I expected it, I meant him to be. Perhaps I *didn't* expect Virginia

to be quite so wise and well-balanced. When she'd given him time to flounder and be gloomy, she cut in, clean and sharp as a sword :

"So far as I can see, you'll be where you *would* have been if you'd never come to Oxford at all." (She husbanded her resources ! She was too clever to say all at once : "if you'd never met Marion, if she'd never bought you.") "What would you have done if there'd been no war ? What did you mean to do after leaving school ? "

Spenser looked unhappy, as I'd intended, and shrugged his shoulders.

"A friend of my father's promised to find me a position in his business," he said. "He's a tea-merchant, I believe."

"Then you're no worse off than before," rejoined Virginia promptly. "If you can still get the job, well and good ; if you can't, you must look for another one. You're better off, really, because you have a year here to the good ; and you never expected to come to Oxford at all."

"I suppose that's true," said Spenser. "All the same, I don't know that I shall fancy Mincing Lane after this place." . . .

"I'm afraid you won't," I said. "If I could have foreseen this, I don't think I should ever have consented to send you here : it's too unsettling. . . . And you may be sure that I shall move heaven and earth to keep you here ; if there's any means of getting round the will. . . . You know there's nothing I wouldn't do for you, and I'm desperately anxious to give you your full time here if we can contrive it. But I'm not sure that we can."

After a long silence, Spenser touched my hand and said :

"You won't let me sympathize, but I want you to feel that everything will be all right. I can look after myself ; we'll hope for the best, and, whatever happens, you're not to worry."

"I'm afraid I can't help worrying as long as there's any uncertainty about you," I said.

Virginia, as I told you, was husbanding her resources ; this was the moment she chose for the attack.

"Spenser's so right," she agreed. "The *first* thing is that you shouldn't worry. You needn't be afraid that he'll have to leave Oxford before his time; some one is sure to come forward, as you did——"

"My dear, the world is not so full of philanthropists as you seem to think," I interrupted.

"Father would do it like a shot," she cried. "He was never at a university himself: he couldn't afford it; and he says it's the thing he regrets most in life. If I asked him——"

"But why should he?" I said.

Virginia hesitated and blushed; I saw Spenser blushing too; and then he murmured:

"I've told her, Virginie."

I could see her manœuvring for position; and I was doing the same. . . . No hostility on either side, no dismay on mine or uncertainty on hers.

"It's the most absolute secret, of course" said Virginia, to gain time and achieve some effect of radiance instead of looking vulgarly triumphant.

"That's why I didn't refer to it," I said.

"But you will *now*!" she coaxed. . . . Spenser, of course, thought she was begging, very sweetly; he could see the smile, but he couldn't see her eyes. "You *will* congratulate us," she said, "and tell us you're pleased?"

I knew she was *ordering* me. . . .

"If you're still of the same mind when the time comes," I laughed. "I think your father's quite right, Virginia: you're both too young to dream of a formal engagement. As, however, he seems to let you consider yourself engaged, I must confess I was hurt, terribly hurt that neither of you thought fit to take me into your confidence."

Spenser stared at the table-cloth, thoroughly uncomfortable, thoroughly ashamed of himself; but Virginia was unabashed:

"There was such a long time to wait that we didn't think it worth while to tell any one yet. And I always felt you rather—disapproved of me. I hope you don't really; or, if you do, I hope you'll think better of me when the time comes; but I felt that, when once we'd

made up our minds to get married, I couldn't bear any opposition." . . .

There had been some kind of sequence, order until then ; but I seemed to lose my grip on what was happening, we broke up into units of two and one, one and two, redistributing ourselves. . . . A panic on the smallest possible scale. . . . It was as though Virginia had kicked me into a corner by myself when she talked about *their* having made up their minds to get married ; no one else mattered, and she began to chatter unconcernedly to Spenser. *He* grouped himself for a moment with her, a moment with me : " Virginie, what nonsense ! *Disapprove* of you ? " " Darling, you don't *disapprove* of her ? " . . .

The panic went on, and it was my turn to group myself with her : " *Disapprove* of you, Virginia ? " The babel continued—I don't know how long : hours, I should think, but I was almost unconscious until Virginia said that it was time to be motoring back and Spenser excused himself to see her downstairs. I don't know how long they were away. I only remember that, when Spenser came back, he shut the door very carefully and harked back to the haunting, imbecile word :

" Darling, you don't *disapprove* of Virginie ? "

And then I went mad.

Oh, no (*quite* reasonably !) I didn't disapprove of her as a girl, but I wasn't sure that she was quite the wife I'd have chosen for him ; in fact, she was so young and inexperienced that I didn't think her at *all* suitable. The youth she'd outgrow, he might say, but he might outgrow her ; did he want to marry the girl he was in love with now or the girl who in five years' time might have changed into a different girl by outgrowing three-quarters of her present self ? Did he know what he wanted ? Had he any idea what it was he loved in her ?

Of course, it was the *essential* her that he loved : all that she would outgrow was frippery, leaving her even more stainless. . . . Stainless ? I told him (oh, still quite reasonably !) that girls of that age only wanted to shew off their rings and boast to their friends that they were engaged. It wasn't love or passion, but a gigantic game. I said I'd

seen her at it—with Bobbie Pentyre: flirting with him, leading him on . . . just so that she could collect another proposal and say she'd refused a great match. . . . Spenser turned as white as a sheet and told me that, please, I wasn't to talk like that.

"It's true," I said.

Oh no, it wasn't true: she'd told him all about it; Pentyre had first taken her utterly by surprise, then persecuted her.

"She told you that?" I asked. "She *would*! Oh, it's all part of the game, to shew how she loves you, what sacrifices she makes for you! She's *drunk* on that! Spenser, Spenser, I once asked you if you knew anything about women, and you said you knew something about one woman. *What? What* do you know about Virginia?"

He knew, at any rate, that he loved her.

"And, while you loved her, while you were newly 'engaged' to her, you wanted me to become your mistress?"

That—well, that blinded him, took his breath away so that he never thought to suggest I'd tempted him.

"God forgive me! oh, God forgive me!" he sobbed.

And then he grovelled on the floor and clawed at my knees, begging me not to tell Virginia. . . .

"And if I'd asked you that night what you meant by love?" I said.

He had no answer, and I made my great speech. Everything I'd done for him, everything I'd suffered, the long black agony when he was away fighting, everything I'd schemed. . . . And everything I *was*, my knowledge and devotion against the pink-and-white of a flighty child who didn't know even how to make love to him. . . . There was nothing I didn't use! I shewed him how he could have all my money if only—no, I didn't ask him in actual words to marry me—if only he'd look at things sensibly, I said; I played on my illness and told him that Penruddock had said it was all due to worry, worry about him. . . . And *he* had my life in his hands, the decision whether I was to get well or not. . . .

Spenser stood with the sweat glistening on his forehead. And I went on till my voice disappeared in a husky whisper. . . . Then came the silence of death ; the room grew darker and darker ; I beckoned to him, because I could hardly make myself heard, and said :

" I refused to regard this seriously, because I knew you'd outgrow it. I'm seeing *for* you what you'll see for yourself if I give you time. I *can't* give you time because my life depends on you. Promise me, Spenser, that you won't marry this girl."

He dragged himself away and dropped on to the sofa with his head between his hands.

" I can't promise that," he said.

" You mean to marry her ? "

" If we haven't changed when the time comes."

" And you'll be unfaithful to her," I told him. " I know you. And she'll be unfaithful to you ; I know *her*. It'll be misery, hell. . . . What else d'you expect ? If you're without love, honour, gratitude. . . ."

No ! I *can't* tell you what I said. I don't remember, I didn't know at the time. A long acid stream of jeers and reproaches. . . . There was nothing I wouldn't say, there was hardly anything I *didn't* say. He was hypnotized. I watched his face and saw a change of expression, saw that he was beginning to hate me . . . and still I went on. I saw that he was seeing through me ; his face lightened : " Oh, *now* I understand ! " he was saying to himself ; " it's all lies, she's trying to get me for herself ; *that's* what she's been playing for all the time. Funny old thing ! " And still I went on. . . . Mad, I was quite mad : every word recoiled on *me* ; I knew it ; and still I went on. . . . I've forgotten what ended it. . . . Something about Virginia, I've no doubt, some foul, baseless charge. Yes, I believe I hinted that she'd offered herself to Bobbie Pentyre ; and, when he would have nothing to do with her, she'd made up this story of his persecuting her. . . . I saw Spenser very quietly collecting my bag and gloves ; then he opened the door and *led* me to it, led me by the arm. I heard him saying :

" If I could repay you all you've spent on me, I would.

I can't now and I shan't be able to for years, but I can at least refuse to take anything more. Good-bye." . . .

I found myself standing in the street a few yards from the porter's lodge. A light rain was falling, and, as I stopped to put up my umbrella, Spenser bowed and turned away. A man nodded to him, and he cried out : " Hullo," with a surprised, artificial cheerfulness. Then he must have decided to keep up the cheerfulness at all costs ; I heard him break into a whistle ; he began to trot back through the rain, swinging his umbrella and hitting at chance pebbles. . . . Dear God ! that was how his father had left me twenty years before, on such another autumn evening, in a corner of the Parks, not a mile away. I suppose that was the beginning of my life, the beginning of anything that mattered, what made a woman of me.

And this . . . ?

I've never known how I came back to London. Instinct of some kind. My voice carried on quite intelligent conversation with ticket-collectors and taxi-men, but *I* had nothing to do with it. I reached home somehow, instinctively picked up my letters. . . . I—or some one in my name—had evidently been sending out invitations for a reception, and the whole world seemed to be coming, including Princess Georgiana. . . . I'd been trying to get her for years, and part of my brain—the part that had talked to the ticket-collectors—was delighted ; another part, with a sort of mental voice attached to it, said : " Don't forget to send out supplementary cards to say that orders are to be worn." . . .

The rest of my brain . . . Thank God, the rest of my brain was asleep, dead. . . .

2

The doctor came to see me next day. I suppose I'd sent for him, or he may have intended all along to come ; I remember he talked about " another examination, to make quite sure," Penruddock's name occurred in every other sentence, and, though I couldn't bring my mind to bear on what he was saying, I noticed at the end that he

was pretending to be very sympathetic and warning me gravely that an operation was necessary.

Then I made a tremendous effort and tried to grapple with things. It was the choice between an operation—and death in a very few weeks; and, before that, the question whether I wanted to live or die. I felt the cloud lifting from my brain until I was my old self—my old self in the sense that I shed all illusions: Spenser was gone, and nothing that I could say or do would bring him back; not even in delirium could I dream of a miracle. . . .

“Point number one,” I said to myself.

And it was point number two that no substitute was any use. I recognized that my career as a woman was over: I should never have children, never know love; I was in my second childhood of sex. That seemed to be, somehow, a terrible waste; I didn’t feel any of the jealousy I’d once felt against you and the others, I didn’t care if people despised or pitied me. I didn’t grow angry with myself for my mistakes, I just wondered what was the use of living if I had missed the biggest thing in life. . . . Hopelessness. . . . And then a quite illogical feeling of relief! Though I hadn’t always realized it, this sex had been a ghastly affliction to me—sometimes a gnawing pain, sometimes a blind madness and sometimes a vague, insistent hunger, like the craving for air when you feel you are being stifled. That was all over. . . .

And, as I began to be glad of it, I wondered what was left, what thing in heaven or earth would be temptation enough to keep me alive when with only a few days of pain I should win peace. . . . The doctor seemed still to be talking about operations, so I asked him whether what he was proposing would be absolutely safe, absolutely sure. Ah well! it was his duty to warn me that there were certain risks, but, while he wouldn’t say definitely that I should be cured, he would like to impress on me solemnly that it was my only chance. Point number three: I might be an invalid, I might have to go through the pain of another operation. . . .

On the other hand, this might justify me in refusing

to be cut about : I could say that the relief would only be temporary and that I was a doomed woman. It depended whether I found anything to make life worth living, now that the vital, eternal thing in me was dead.

Well—oh, I was ever so reasonable!—I knew that, if I were five-and-twenty years older, I should be reconciled to this life-in-death ; I should be an old woman, whereas now I was an old woman in everything but age. At seventy I should still love my house, my parties, my friends ; I should still want to go on living. And even *now* I wanted to go on living ! As soon as I'd recovered from the shock, as soon as I was used to my life-in-death, I should go back to my old ways with as much zest as at the time when I didn't know of Spenser's existence.

When I'd recovered from the shock. . .

Immediately I began to see a difference. For one thing, my career was over on the day when my position was made ; there was little excitement when my pre-eminence was recognized. And, for another, I had changed my perspective : in the old days you may say that I sacrificed my father, betrayed my lover, went without children and denied myself love for the sake of winning a crown in literary London ; it was worth it, I thought, and I fancied that I knew what I was doing. Well, I began to see that none of the things I'd given up really mattered to me and—what was more—that I'd never really cared about what I'd won : the *salon* hadn't been an escape from Martin, because I didn't mind him apart from his general disgustingness ; I didn't need a drug or distraction, because I didn't care for the things I was giving up or trying to forget.

Had I ever cared for anything ?

Well, I cared for something now. I *had* cared for it, at least ; and I needed something to make me forget it. I wanted a drug strong enough to keep me alive when everything worth having had been taken out of my life ; when I'd seen myself struggling for what wasn't worth having and losing whatever was touched with the divine and eternal.

But could I go back, now that my eyes had been opened ?

I didn't want to die ; I was rather afraid of death ; I

had to give the new life a trial. And at once I saw things with black-and-white decision: the doctor was talking about nursing-homes and suggesting that Penruddock should operate, when I broke through it all and told him that, if he couldn't guarantee the success of the operation, I wanted time to consider whether it was worth having it.

And then I turned him out of the house and set to work on the preparations for my party. . . .

This was my test-case. . . .

I was putting into the scale all I'd done, all I was, all that I could ever hope to be or do; that was my achievement, what I'd made of my life; I was going to look at it and tell myself whether it was worth while. No one could help me in my decision! My dear Ada, if I'd said to Margaret Poynter or two score of women like her: "Will you change places?" they'd have said "Yes!" I could have had money, rank—there's nothing they *wouldn't* have given me for my success!

You think my head is turned, but this is solemn truth: if Margaret Poynter had put herself into the scale, reckoned up *her* achievements, she'd have said perforce that she'd spent half her life and three-quarters of her income in trying to get where I *was*. . . . Could she dream that I ever had doubts? Ah, *there* was irony for you! My *success*. . . I had to take myself in hand for fear I should give judgement without waiting to try my case. "A fair chance," I said: "you shall see this life of yours at its very best." . . .

I had entertained so little since the war that I'd almost forgotten the new generation of the last half-dozen years: and I'd had other things to think of without bothering to meet all the poets and novelists and painters who had achieved their nine-days' wonder. They weren't worth it! I've never lost my grip on the fundamentals of literature and art: I can assure you—as I told Arkwright, who *agreed* with me—there has been no first-rate work in England since the heyday of Sargent, Galsworthy, Masfield and Conrad. Of music I can't speak: there my opinion's not worth having. There's been immense literary *activity*, if you will; immense enthusiasm, which is all to the

good ; a very high level of the second-rate, and a tremendous back-patting and blowing of trumpets. But there's been nothing that will last ; and, if a man's not recognized by his own generation, I don't know why he should fancy that any other generation will recognize him. . . . So, if I didn't invite many of these young men and women, they weren't missed—except by the Lady Poynters who think that everything new must infallibly be good.

But I had the others. All the great figures. . . . I was amazed to see my own success. There were the literary people and the politicians and what Martin used to call "the smatterers and chatterers". I had the diplomatic people, too ; and that interested me, because I'd never made any great effort to get them ; at first I ruled them out as unattainable, then I said I didn't want them because they contributed nothing, and then—without warning—they were at my feet ! When Eleanor Ross telephones to say that Count Ristori is dining with her and may she bring him, you may feel that patience bestows its own reward. Did I care whether he came or not ? Well, for what it's worth, you'll get four duchesses, generally speaking, for one ambassador. . . .

And, of course, I had Princess Georgiana—for the first time. That set the tone and standard : in old days, when I was afraid to spend money, I used to pretend conversation was the one thing that mattered ; any refreshment was a concession to the unintelligent. Incredibly plain my food always was ! But I felt that, for the princess and for my great test-case, we must have champagne. I had men in to wait, too ; and most of the catering was done by Rentouls ; and I arranged every flower with my own hands. . . . Oh, I can assure you, I spared neither money nor trouble. And, gradually, whether I liked it or not, I became infected with the enthusiasm that I was trying to force into my servants. It *should* be a success, I said ; and, when I found myself caring about success, I felt that I'd triumphed, that I wanted to live, that I *would* live. . . .

Triumph. . . .

For days after leaving Spenser I'd been telling myself that I—or the woman in me—was dead ; now, so far as I was concerned, Spenser was dead. While I felt no resentment, I didn't miss him or care what happened to him ; when he sent me a letter the day before my party, I was no more surprised or thrilled to see his writing than I should have been on receiving a letter from some friend abroad who hadn't written for several years. I was surprised by what he *said*, but it left me entirely cold.

A wild, incoherent letter. . . Of the "Are-you-mad-or-am-I?" variety. He was *miserable* ! . . . Couldn't understand what had happened, why we'd had that terrible scene. . . Apologized and begged me to forget anything he'd said. . . Could not and would not allow a quarrel after all I'd done for him, all the love I'd shewn him and the love he felt for me. . . Failed utterly to understand how we'd ever come to say such things. . . .

It was a love-letter after a lovers' quarrel ; and,—I always feel there's a little bit of the lawyer in every man—after the apology and the "being-at-a-loss-to-understand," he set himself to explain, to put his case very logically and forcibly, to leave on record some version that shewed him in the most reasonable and generous light. What was the difference between us ? Obviously he couldn't say that Virginia and I were fighting for him, so he put it that I was *perhaps justifiably* annoyed because he'd got engaged without consulting me. Well, really and truly, he'd *wanted* to tell me, but the Burnleys made such a point of secrecy that he'd bottled up his frank inclinations until he could bear it no longer. While he'd not told even his mother, he'd always meant to tell me before he took any decisive step.

As he *promised*. Perhaps it was a decisive step to become engaged ; but, sooner than break his promise, he'd ask Virginia to cancel the engagement until he could come to her with my approval. If he'd been precipitate, it was because he couldn't work or sleep until she'd ended the uncertainty ; but, though the engagement was "the sheet-anchor of his happiness", he'd sacrifice it if it was the price of my affection. . . .

And so on.

Until you go mad at five-and-forty, as I had done, until you fight to the death against a child half your age, you'll never realize the *arrogance* of youth. "I'm young, young, young—and nothing else matters" is the cry. I told you that, when I put Virginia to bed at Shiplake, I thought her a fool for parading a body that would spread and go to pieces before she was thirty. It wasn't folly, it was *arrogance*: she lay with her head thrown back, shewing me the marvellous line of her throat and all the creamy velvet of her skin; that was more subtle, surely, than telling me I had lines in my neck and a tiny shade of hollow over my collar-bones? When I had time to think it out, I didn't fail to recognize in some sort that there was nearly a generation between us; but it was Spenser's letter that marked our real difference of age. So ingenuous, so troubled, so instinctively, primitively cunning, so romantic in his talk of "sheet-anchors" and "sacrifices" and "promises" and "prices of affection", so mock-heroic in his superlatively generous offer!

I don't know if he fancied that he *was* offering me something or if he just hoped that I should *think* he was. . . . What good was it to me for him to postpone his engagement when I'd shewn my hand, when I knew that, if he didn't marry Virginia, he'd marry another raw, characterless infant with some other name? I had put him so much out of my mind that his letter hardly roused me to interest; as for any idea of scheming against Virginia . . .

"Dearest boy," I wrote. "*I blame you for one thing, myself for all the rest. When I told you that I was seriously ill, you would—if you'd been a little older and more experienced—have firmly refused to discuss anything that might possibly upset me. Had I been in normal health, we should have nothing now to regret; but—I'll confess frankly—I was cut to the quick that you should have taken this step without consulting me and I was so much overwhelmed with the certainty of disaster that I spoke with more candour than discretion. Whenever you marry (if I am still alive), I shall lose the person I love best in the world; but your happiness*

Is so much the greatest thing in life to me that I would not ask you to postpone it for a day or an hour. When, instead of happiness, I see you rushing to catastrophe, it is a different thing altogether; I know something of Virginia and a great deal of you, I have considerable experience and I don't judge people or things without patient observation. With the fullest sense of responsibility I say that my slight but only consolation at this moment is the thought that you cannot marry for some years; if you ever do—and I pray God that one or other of you will have learnt wisdom first—you can look forward to a month of happiness and a lifetime of misery. To save you from that I would say all and more than all that I said to you at Oxford.” . . .

I forget my exact words, but I remember thinking that I had retired gracefully; and the only thing that I deplored was our outburst over money. If Spenser refused to quarrel with me, I couldn't quarrel with him; if I didn't quarrel with him, I couldn't cut short his allowance; and, though I was indifferent to him, I still hated Virginia enough to grudge every penny that helped to equip him for her. But it couldn't be avoided; his allowance was the price I had to pay for my graceful retirement; and I only determined that he shouldn't make the best of both worlds in any other way: he'd said that he *must* see me, but I didn't choose to have my time wasted, so I said that he could come to my party, if he liked, but that immediately after that I expected to go into a nursing-home. . . .

• And then I dismissed him from my mind. It's no use pretending that I *shouldn't* have found it hard to see him walking about arm-in-arm with Virginia, while every one gushed about how sweet and happy they looked. I never wanted to see them again; I thanked Heaven that I very seldom *should*. . . .

3

I was telling you about my party. . . .

It was the party of a *dream*! I made Claudel play for

a few minutes at the beginning, while I stood at the head of the stairs; and, as the people came up, I saw them turning to recognize my Celestine prints. I've good ears, too, and I heard them, while they thought they were still out of range, saying: "This really *does* make you feel the war's over," or else: "You've never been here before? Oh, Marion's parties are always *too* wonderful." . . . They'd discussed me so much that, by the time they reached me, I was quite afraid of disappointing them; but, when the moment came, I recollected some old knack, I dealt with them, I was adequate and more than adequate. . . .

You wouldn't have called me a sick woman if you'd seen me then! I had so much power in hand that I could detach myself and look on at my own skill. And it was astonishing to see one woman dominating all that crowd, astonishing to think that one woman could have collected such a crowd to dominate! I saw myself grouping, dividing, reforming them; giving a cue here, suggesting a reply there, summarizing, adding the *comble* with an epigram. I had all my old ease, all my old quickness. . . .

All my old *knowledge*. . . . General Lanchester had refused when I invited him and now asked if I would allow him to come.

"But of course!" I said; and then, in a whisper, "I expected you all along. Your mission couldn't start until you'd had *some* kind of reply from Moscow."

"What mission is this?" he asked with a great air of surprise.

"I only know what I've heard from Stockholm," I said.

"I don't know what that may be," he said "but—in the public interest—I hope you're keeping it to yourself."

"I am," I told him, "but, if you don't want it discussed . . ."

And then I gave him the name of one man who, to my way of thinking, ought to be put under lock and key.

Tom Lanchester nodded gravely, put his nose into the drawing-room and then slipped back to the War Office . . . to take certain necessary steps!

When the princess arrived, the party began in earnest: Claudel came forward from the piano, I made one or two presentations, arranged a new grouping of the room and set them to talk. It was astounding! *No!! I* was astounding! You see, for nearly six years the little coteries had been chattering harder than ever in their lives before, but there had been no one to stand apart from the coteries and look beyond them, no one with a sense of the English tradition to tell art-snobs how far Orpen or John or Wyndham Lewis or Epstein was succeeding to that tradition. . . . I had the lines of the discussion carefully set: the princess (if *she* hadn't asked me, I'd have made some one else do it!) said how interesting it must be to any one with my love of literature and art to study the effect of the war on the young writers. There was a respectful silence while she was speaking, and then Margaret Poynter sighed like a furnace and said: "For *them*, at least, nothing can ever be the same. Men—no, *boys!*—who've looked death in the face without flinching. . . ."

She went on for about three minutes; or, to be exact, for a page and a half of Ritson's *They Also Serve*, quoting without acknowledgement, but with portentous good faith—what poor Harry Ritson regarded as his most mordant satire on the sentimental stay-at-homes who talked of the war as "the Great Adventure." . . . She ended by comparing it with the Armada and talking about a new Shakespeare; we were spared nothing. And Ritson was within a yard of her, afraid to catch my eye!

When she'd done, I told them all that, while nothing could ever be the same for a man who'd lived through the war, whether he'd fought or not, we mustn't expect great literature for ten years; at least that time was wanted for people to absorb the war and to regain their perspective; until then the only thing new and great in literature would be a new and great preoccupation with blood and the scream of shells and horror and mutilation and the egotism of the "sensitive" spirits who lose themselves in phrases about "the waste of young lives".

It was true! You can't write when you're delirious,

and all these boys are delirious ; you can hardly describe your delirium. Has a single contemporary poem or novel come down to us from the Napoleonic Wars ? Not one ! The " classics " were written years later, in quiet rooms, by peaceful, middle-aged men who had seen nothing of the atrocities in the Peninsula or the retreat from Moscow—*War and Peace*, *The Dynasts* and the rest. Yet there was a flood of contemporary outpouring, just as in this last war. . . .

That gave them their cue ! I detached myself while " Rupert Brooke " and " Wells " and " Barbusse " and " Ibañez " hurtled through the air. After half an hour they saw—what I could have told them at the beginning—that *time* must be the test and that in twenty years their Barbusses and Brookes might be forgotten. They couldn't bear, however, to lose the opportunity of shewing off all the books they'd read, so I gave them another cue by asking Eleanor Ross whether—achievement apart—she could detect a new *spirit* in literature. . . .

Malicious, if you like, for poor Eleanor never has an opinion of her own ; she glared like a frightened cat and squeaked : " New spirit ? *What* did she say ? " as though I'd spoken in some strange tongue. . . . And Her Grace the Duchess of Ross was always telling these people about the wonderful parties she gave and how she said this and that to all the big men and how they always said : " You're so right. " . . . Speechless she was, helpless ; and that, if you please, was the woman who could never make out why every one came to Marion Shelley's "*salon*", as, no doubt, she would like it to be called. . . . She'd be gasping and gibbering still if Margaret Poynter hadn't hurried to her aid ; the blind leading the mad, I felt. . . .

I next unleashed them in pursuit of war-psychology. Then I presented Harry Ritson to the princess and wandered into the midst of my performing animals with a flick of the whip here, a caress there. I've never been so conscious of having the whole room at my feet : it was a triumph ; they kept turning to me as the arbiter and bringing their votive offerings to my shrine. . . .

" And now," I said to myself, " as a test-case ? "

I stood at one end of my long drawing-room, with my eyes half-closed, drinking it all in: the dresses and jewels, the uniforms and decorations. The *people*! I don't know whether you read any kind of list the following day? . . .

And I'd done it from nothing! Beyond, beyond all the lights of the room I saw a shadowy picture opening out as though the wall were fading: Cambridge, and the only room that I remember well there, the big nursery with the 'Simple-Simon-met-a-pie-man' wall-paper. I looked again at my drawing-room. . . Then I saw Polehampton and our house there, standing out in dingy red brick, against the greater dinginess of the background with the black cinder-courts and the grey-black sham-Gothic of the University and the Cimmerian black of that vast railway station and the chimneys of the blast-furnaces behind. . . My own room again! . . . Then Oxford! . . . Then my own room—with dear old Ristori coming to say good-bye and asking my leave to slip away *very* quietly, as he had work to do.

That seemed to root me in the present, with an unshakable sense of material achievement. What did it matter now that I'd had to struggle for a year or so to get where I was? What did it matter that, in other days, Eric Lane used to come in, whispering: "He's . . . a little faint. Keep them in here for a moment, while I get him upstairs," or that I heard Martin being bumped into his room and wondered how many of the others heard it too? What did it matter that St. John's Wood was crawling with my nephews and nieces while I had to call myself a dead woman? It *was* worth it; and, if I hadn't felt that in my bones ever since I was a child, I couldn't have done it. . . .

"*La chambre introuvable*," murmured Ristori.

Little Taillepie de Belabre, who was standing near us, said:

"*La femme introuvable*."

I looked round the room for the last time; and it was true. . . .

When I accompanied the princess to supper, she *over-*

whelmed me with compliments ; and yet I'm not sure that she didn't miss the most brilliant part of the evening, for one or two people who had been shy of speaking before now unbent and let themselves go. And I should think that at least two hundred new people poured in from the theatres and the opera. There was an atmosphere of success, a radiant glow awaiting them, and they responded to it at once. I had nothing to do ! The party was running itself ! Without saying another word I could hold them magnetized.

It was time to scatter a phrase here and there to the people who would best repay it. Margaret Poynter would ruin a party of archangels by herding them into a room to be shouted at and then letting them go with no more of a *personal* relationship established than if they'd been so many dozen hired waiters. It was because these people were my *friends* that they came again and again ; I didn't treat them as trophies of the chase but as individual human beings who *mattered* to me more than any one in the world. *Gentle* Marion, *sympathetic* Marion. I always feel it was a great achievement, but on the whole I'm glad you didn't see me making fools of them, Ada ; you'd have thought more highly of my technique than of my sincerity. . . .

I was turning away from Marcus Imbert when some one touched my arm and I found Spenser at my side. He was a little bit pale, and his eyes were restless ; but I felt so completely at ease that I couldn't imagine any one else's feeling embarrassed. More than that : I felt so independent of him that I wondered why he'd troubled to come. To "make it up" ? He was so unimportant to me now that I hardly remembered our quarrel. . . .

"I hope I'm not too late," he said. "I couldn't get here before."

"Of course not !" I answered. "You're just in time for supper."

"I was wondering whether you'd let me give *you* some," said Spenser, "if you hadn't had it already."

I was so independent of him that I didn't care whether he was embarrassed or not, I wouldn't have raised a finger

to punish him . . . and yet I wanted desperately to find out why he'd come, what he would say. There was nothing to *explain*; he loved his Virginia and he didn't love me; and, thank goodness, he was still so much blinded by his old affection that he hadn't seen or understood a hundredth part of the fight I'd made to get him. Perhaps, in addition to curiosity, I wanted to end things and drop out of his life as soon as possible; you may be very sure that Virginia had missed nothing! For all her youth and—I daresay—her innocence, she was a woman and understood instinctively; with every day that went by, with every confidence they exchanged, Virginia would see me more stark and defenceless.

"I should like supper with you," I told Spenser, "if you'll wait just a few minutes. So many people are still arriving." . . .

And then I saw Virginia. My invitation to Mildred Burnley had included her, of course, but somehow I'd not expected to see her. Yet we were nominally at peace; my outbreak at Oxford only took place after she'd left; and, so long as she thought I had any influence over Spenser, so long as he talked lightly about "cancelling" their engagement, she wouldn't want a declaration of war. But I was surprised to see her. . . . Disconcerted. . . . She was like a wicked fairy who had come to spoil everything.

Mildred apologized for her lateness by saying that they'd all been at the play. "All", I judged, would include Spenser; and his burning desire to see me and patch up our quarrel could be postponed until he'd had his fill of Virginia's company; if he was unimportant to me, Heaven knows I was no less unimportant to him. Suddenly I decided that I wouldn't go through the farce of listening to his protestations. . . .

"Then you've had no supper?" I said. "Why don't you have some now and come up afterwards? And, Spenser, I *must* stay here for the present; why should you wait for me? I'd much rather that you took Virginia down." . . .

Of course, they both murmured "Oh no!" but I said

again that I would much rather. . . . And they didn't require very much pressing. I watched them going downstairs ; and Virginia couldn't restrain herself from touching his hand ! I turned to the new arrivals, talked to them. . . .

At least I suppose I did. . . . From the moment when Virginia entered the house, I seemed to lose my grip on everything, on myself. I became vague, tired ; I wished people would go instead of telling me what a marvellous party it was. . . . I wished they wouldn't bother me to go down to supper when I knew Spenser and that girl were still there, ready to scorch me with their happiness. . . .

And then, quite irrationally, I felt that it would hurt less to see them, to get this, too, over. . . .

4

To my surprise, they weren't in the supper-room. They certainly hadn't come upstairs again ; and they would hardly leave without saying good-bye or telling the Burnleys. They must be sitting and talking somewhere, walking up and down in the street, perhaps. . . . I invented an urgent message for Spenser and went in search of them.

He knew my house as well as I did ; and I could follow the workings of his mind. They were in Martin's old study, in the dark, side by side in front of the window, silhouetted by the street-lamps : they stood with their arms twined round each other's waist, and Virginia had her head on his shoulder. They weren't talking or kissing, there was none of the blind abandonment of that first night when I caught them, when they found themselves . . . when, I suppose, I found *myself* ; ever since then they'd belonged to each other, unwaveringly ; they were one flesh and they'd *become* one flesh that night so many months ago. What had *I* been to them ? In Spenser's eyes, a silly sentimental old woman whom he tolerated because she had been kind to him ? In Virginia's, a

hateful, desperate old woman, fighting for her life and for the human woman inside her on the last day of her late summer?

But they didn't regard me seriously, I had no part in their life! For a moment Spenser and I might have been lovers, but what difference would that have made? I should have maddened Virginia, and Spenser would have loathed himself for allowing me to brush away his bloom; but I couldn't have kept him, I couldn't touch his spirit. . . . Even if I'd wanted to. . . And there *was* a time when I did, when I felt that, if I couldn't get him for myself, I'd spoil him for every one else. . . .

They seemed half asleep, dreaming. . . .

Dear God, didn't I know their dreams? Twenty, and in love, and so sure of themselves. All eternity stretched before them; they at least would never age or change; the very sun would cool before their love! . . . Virginia lifted her head and put her lips to his cheek; I saw his arm tighten round her; she sighed as though her happiness were more than she could bear. And then they went back to their dreams of this life that was only beginning. . . .

I wandered into the hall, up the stairs. This life of theirs that was only beginning, this life of mine that was over! In the drawing-room they were discussing Epstein's *Christ*, and some one was being devastatingly intelligent about it. "It is Christ the fanatic," I heard, "the eastern Christ, a virile figure eaten up with the passion of his own teaching. Your ornate robes and flowing hair are an Italian convention, just as the Christ of Italian art is an Italian." . . .

"*Was* Christ a fanatic?" asked some one else. "The gospels were written *in* the east, *by* the east, *for* the east; but, unless it's fanaticism to die for your faith, there's no trace of violence or even great virility in the gospels except when the money-changers are driven out of the temple. *Gentleness* was the new idea that Christ imposed on an audience of hard, cruel, sun-baked, eastern fanatics. 'Suffer little children to come unto Me. . . Feed My sheep.' Love . . . non-resistance. Was Epstein's Christ the man who saved the woman taken in adultery?

Leonardo gave his Christ an Italian face, but he gave to his Italian face the spirit of Christ as revealed in the gospels." . . .

So it went on. And, an hour before, I should have taken it in hand !

So it would go on, night after night, year after year. . . While Virginia and Spenser stood with fingers intertwined, whispering their love to the stars. *This* was what I had achieved, *this* was what I had left to keep me alive !

Margaret Poynter was sitting near the door, and I drew her outside.

"I've not been very well lately," I whispered, "and I was very foolish to attempt this party. Now I feel so tired that, if I don't lie down, I'm afraid of fainting. Will you take my place ? You need only say it's a head-ache, and I don't want a doctor."

As I went upstairs I turned for one last look at my drawing-room. More crowded than ever, I thought, but I couldn't bother to see who was there. . . .

Next day the notes and the telephone messages and the flowers began to pour in. Somebody must have told my doctor, for he immediately announced his intention of coming to see me. . . .

It was then that I made my last effort and came here for refuge. If I haven't ordered my life very satisfactorily, I can at least get the best out of death. . . .

THE END

AT SEA, OFF PUERTO RICO.

4 March, 1921.

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Author of "Peg the Rake," etc.

The man who understands the heart of a woman, the weakness of man, and the faith and trust of a little child, is indeed a great character, meriting complete and detailed delineation. "The Man Who Understood" has a singularly human and lovable personality, always believing in the best, and forgiving the worst; adapting the healing powers of Nature to man's skill and patience, and never ceasing to preach the axiom that to love much is to forgive much.

Many Waters

By M. E. FRANCIS

Author of "Fiander's Widow," "The Story of Mary Dunne," "Pastorals of Dorset," "Renewals," etc.

The scene of this intensely human and dramatic story, which is laid in a remote part of Wales, is described with much imaginative charm. Evan Griffiths, a prosperous writer, shares his home with his young cousin Rhys, who works for him and is deeply devoted to him, when for good or ill the girlish figure of Nest, a child of nature bright as the morning, comes into their lives. The story of her love for Rhys, of the desperate passion and tragic end of Evan, the haunted distraction of Nest and her rescue from death by her lover is one that holds the attention from start to finish.

The Gargoyle

By MRS. ARTHUR STALLARD

Author of "The Ford," etc.

A distinctive plot characterises this story of Dephinium, a pretty girl of low birth whose chief ambition is to be a 'lady.' She is befriended by the Hon. Una Upton, through whom she realises her ambition by marrying Sir Laurence Murcott. Disillusion follows; Dephinium objects to motherhood and dies, having found that "to be a lady is such a hard, dull business."

Green Butterflies

By ROY BRIDGES

Author of "Dead Men's Gold," "The Immortal Dawn," etc.

A story of Australian life, with the action covering three or four generations, and the setting is Van Diemen's Land when the Penal Settlement was in full swing.

The joys of a country girl who, brought to new surroundings, is loved and loves too well, are made real and tempered with the trials and tribulations which naturally beset her and her offspring.

Convincing descriptions characterise this book.

The Vanishing Point

By CONINGSBY DAWSON

Author of "The Kingdom Round the Corner," "The Test of Scarlet," etc.

Mystery—intrigue—kaleidoscopic change of scene. Daring adventure, and beautiful women—one of whom is the wickedest in the world or the greatest saint. These are the things to which "The Vanishing Point" led Philip Hindwood, an American who knew nothing at all about women. It is the swiftly-moving story of certain picturesque types of people who have figured prominently in newspaper dispatches during the past few years.

Of all present-day writers Coningsby Dawson is perhaps the best fitted to tell the intimate story of these strange and romantic characters. Among modern authors he is one of the most widely-experienced, and he is personally familiar with all of the vast area over which his book breathlessly sweeps its reader.

The Life of Isobel Erne By PEGGY WEBLING

Author of "Comedy Corner," "The Fruitless Orchard," etc.

This is a London story of three sisters, Cecilia Reuben, Laura Welwyn and Isobel Erne. Daughters of a box-maker, their characters, marriages and circumstances are widely diverse. Isobel, living in the lake country, is the guest of a famous writer, Godfrey Strang, whose influence in a subtle way colours the whole of her life. Her friends, her lovers, even her sisters never realise the effect upon her nature of a few short weeks of utter joy and how they live in her memory. The "Life" has a happy ending—happiness tempered by the experience of sorrow, courageous effort, mischance, and love that grows from the stern and beautiful reality of common things.

This novel is a great example of the versatility which enables the authoress to create new characters in new settings and so provide an added charm of individuality in each of her works.

The Manuscript of Youth By DIANA PATRICK

Author of "The Wider Way," "Islands of Desire," etc.

Jocelyn and Rex, both of artistic bent, run away from industrial surroundings and achieve a measure of success, Jocelyn on the stage and Rex as a writer. The ravages of war deprive Rex of his creative genius, and he is obliged to earn a livelihood as a waiter. Jocelyn dies, and among his belongings his friend finds two manuscripts of unmistakable power and charm. Tempted, he takes them to a publisher, who sets on them a high value. An unexpected inheritance comes to him from his father, and he goes to Isabel, the dead man's sister, and learns that she was the author of the manuscripts upon which he has built a false reputation. Isabel realises his love for her almost on the eve of her marriage to another man, and so disaster is averted and a happy conclusion reached.

Miss Mapp

By E. F. BENSON

Author of "Dodo Wonders," etc.

Clever, amusing, it is a chronicle of the doings of a group of women and men in a seaside township. Of this group, Miss Mapp is the dominating personality. Not too *passé*, she has set her mind on one day marrying Major Flint, retired. The reader is carried along easily; it all makes entertaining reading, true to life as lived by the comfortably-placed human beings in an English township.

The Woman Who Knew By MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "Sea Wolves," "The Garden of Swords," etc.

Here we have the fiction of many countries. Mr. Max Pemberton has laid his scenes chiefly in Europe, but he has visited Spain, Morocco, the Riviera and the Balearic Isles in quest of material. All is post-war, and the war has no place in this virile volume. Sex stories abound, but there are also scenes of adventure in Mr. Pemberton's best mood. Particularly interesting are those chapters which deal with the Mediterranean and the isles adjacent; while lovers of Le Touquet will find much to interest them. The whole volume is representative of the author's bias toward the love story and the story of adventure; while the dramatic note is, as usual, heard in all the more stirring episodes. It may be added that humour is not absent, and that in "William de Luxe" we have one of the drollest stories of recent years.

Stony Ground

By LADY MILES

Author of "The Red Flame," "Red, White and Grey," etc.

The study of a strong, very egotistical woman, Prudence Forrest, who subdues all who approach. She and her delightfully human sister, Audrey, are daughters of a widow, Lady Forrest, and are very strictly brought up. After marriage she becomes a virtuous vampire, intensely cold and conventional. By egoism and virtue she sucks all the enjoyment of life from those who love her to conquer them, until they have no individuality left. Often she sees her own selfishness, but always relapses into the same faults. The book ends with Prudence completely triumphant. The side characters are many. The motive is the appalling strength of an egotistical conventional virtue backed by respectability and apparently irreproachable conduct, which does more harm than any vice could do, lacking all sympathy because it is quite untempted by the grosser or more natural sins.

Soliloquy

By STEPHEN McKENNA

Author of "Lady Lilith," "The Education of Eric Lane," "The Secret Victory," etc.

A remarkable book, embodying the daring delineation of the character of woman, and unfolding the life reminiscences of one of that sex.

Change Partners

By HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Author of "Quinneys," "The House of Peril," etc.

This story concerns two husbands who, rather bored with life, agree to go off together on a walking tour in Normandy. They do not tell their wives where they are going, but their better halves, being very modern women, put their heads together and resolve to follow their husbands and punish them for walking off in this cavalier manner.

The story tells of the punishment meted out to the wanderers and of embarrassing circumstances under which one of the wives finds herself in company with the husband of the other.

Sowing Seeds in Danny By NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Author of "The Second Chance," "Purple Springs," etc.

Pearl Watson, a delightfully human Irish-Canadian girl, has already been introduced to more than 20,000 readers in the Dominion as the heroine of "Purple Springs," and the enchantment of her love affair, which interested the government of an entire province, will be felt in the same degree when reading the bright, characteristic incidents of Canadian life and of the wonderfully realistic influence which this girl has on the several characters with whom she is in contact.

Lovers of humour, incident, and the brighter side of life will agree that "Sowing Seeds in Danny" is a great Canadian novel.

Anybody's Husband

By MRS. HORACE TREMLETT

Author of "Platonic Peter," "A Knight in Paris," etc.

Colonel Sir Rupert Allison, having resolved to marry in order to get himself an heir more to his taste than his nephew, Dick, falls in love with the niece of Lady Mora, a widow who loves him herself. But Dick and the girl, Floris, are secretly married, and it is only when Floris hears of Dick's death in Africa that she reveals the secret to Sir Rupert, who then marries her. How Dick turns up alive and how Sir Rupert leaves the way clear for the young pair are dramatic incidents of a clever, amusing comedy full of piquant situations and sparkling dialogue.

Annette and Bennett

By GILBERT CANNAN

Author of "Pugs and Peacocks," "Sembal," etc.

Dealing with the industrial revolution in England, this intense drama of the Stucco House brings together all the threads of the history of a family dominated by its most despised and contemned member and compelled in the end to turn from the emptiness of material success to the spiritual store amassed through his obstinate failure. James Lawrie is never so splendidly himself as when he is making a perfect fool of himself, and it is when he is most comically in misery that he most boldly trails his cloud of glory.

The Honest Man

By UNA L. SILBERRAD

Author of "Green Pastures," etc.

The scene of Miss Silberrad's new novel is laid partly in London and partly in Kendal and the moor country that lies on the border of Westmorland and Yorkshire. It is the story of how a sober middle-aged citizen of the seventeenth century came into a fortune and found romance; and of the unexpected things that happened as a result of this change in his circumstances. There is a very charming love interest in the story, as one would expect from the author of "Green Pastures" and "Sampson Rideout—Quaker."

The Way of the World

By M. MORGAN GIBBON

Author of "Helen Marsden," "The Pharisees."

The story of a detached girl of to-day, who is wooed by many men, but cares only for Hervey, whose mother, Lady Hannay, opposes the marriage. A ne'er-do-well son of the Manor near which she lives commits a burglary and is shot by his own brother, one of her lovers, who then shoots himself. When the attentions of her many wooers have been diverted from her by various circumstances, she eventually marries Hervey.

A Remarkable First Novel.

The Box of Spikenard

By MRS. RAYMOND BOILEAU

The central theme of this remarkable book is the fluctuating relationship of a husband of high gifts, whose first motive—he is a soldier—is devotion to duty; and his wife, who loves him, and, for the first few years, is completely dominated by him. She is a character of great fundamental goodness and considerable charm, with streaks of Celtic imagination and playful devilry. Both characters live as individuals, but they also embody the universal and fundamental differences which bring about misunderstanding between men of action and women in love. As a study of this position the book is of great interest, and the delineation is penetrating and almost fiercely sincere. It contains many tragic passages, especially the deliberate death of the wife's brother, but the end is happy. The characters are each in their own way delightful.

Rooted Up

By DOROTHEA CONYERS

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy," etc.

The story of a wild Irishman who, when his home is burnt, goes to England to live with an uncle, and there retrieves his fallen fortunes. The English girl, whom he loves, objects to his wild ways.

The Whispering City

By GABRIELLE VALLINGS

Author of "Bindweed," "Tumult," etc.

The romance of a young Englishman who goes to a little semi-obliterated Spanish port, in the hope of unravelling the threads of a mystery connected with his father's youth. The scene is laid against a background of picturesque local colour and descriptions of Spanish life in a place of which it has been written: "The Moor left his heart's blood to beat perpetually under the Spanish skin." Hence it is a whispering city, a place of ghosts, a Spanish mistress for ever sighing for her Moorish lover—a city in which the serenade of the passionate lover is never silent.

There is a very strong love interest and a modern study of the occult.

What the Blounts Did

By LADY KING-HALL

Author of "An Engagement."

Readers who enjoyed Lady King-Hall's previous novel will find added charms in its successor, which tells of a supposed poor relation from Australia, in reality a millionaire seeking an heir, snubbed by Lady Blount, who thinks him poor and unworthy of acknowledgment. Natural charm characterises the story of the man's quest and its happy result.

Minuet and Fox-Trot

By AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

A thrilling, kaleidoscopic collection which reveals more than ever the versatility and mastery of the art of short-story writing possessed by these famous authors.

Love in a Pit Village

By LADY MUIR MACKENZIE

Author of "Kate's Comedy of Tears," etc.

A story of great human interest, with the characters of three principal women drawn with conviction. The vicissitudes of Belinda, the unmarried mother of the pit doctor's son, are wonderfully real and well portrayed.

Captain Blood

By RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "Scaramouche," "The Trampling of the Lilies," etc.

From the logs and diaries of Jeremiah Pitt—which Mr. Sabatini claims to have discovered—the romantic story of Captain Peter Blood has been mainly reconstructed.

Sir Henry Morgan, most celebrated of all the buccaneer leaders, had an able chronicler in the person of the Dutchman Esquemeling, who sailed with him. What Esquemeling did for Morgan, Jeremiah Pitt has done for Captain Blood.

The career of Blood, a cultured man driven by the malignity of Fate to indulge an inborn appetite for adventure, is an Odyssey set aglow by the great love which kept him honourable amid dishonour.

A White Man By MRS. FRANCES EVERARD

Author of "A Daughter of the Sand."

The true ring which characterised "A Daughter of the Sand" from start to finish is not missing from Mrs. Frances Everard's second novel, which is as powerful as its predecessor, and, incidentally, has also a Northern African setting.

This "romance of the East" recounts the adventures of a young, beautiful orphan, Madeleine, who shares a legacy with her artist friend, Lorette. The two set off to find the glow and glamour of the East, after Madeleine has refused Jim Weston, a rising young Press man, whom she really loves, but will not admit the fact. After meeting Jim again, Madeleine marries a Frenchman but hardly is the wedding reception begun before an Arab produces proofs that this man's mother was an Arab, and that, although he is white, his brother, who died, was black.

Maurice, the husband, horror-struck, knows that he can never let Madeleine live with him as his wife, nor make her the mother of half-castes. Maurice is killed in battle against Arabs.

Ample excitement and a satisfactory ending are keynotes of this story.

The Flying Fifty-Five By EDGAR WALLACE

Author of "The Secret House," "The Fighting Scouts," etc.

The Earl of Fontwell, a wealthy young nobleman, undertakes for a bet to walk to Scotland and back in a given time, with only a shilling in his pocket. Nearing home on his return journey, he is seen by pretty Stella Barrington, who trains the racehorses which her father has left her, and because of his unkempt and ragged appearance is mistaken by her for a tramp. In pity she offers to give him work in her stable, and the sporting young nobleman accepts the offer.

Thereafter he is able to frustrate the plans of an unscrupulous enemy of hers and train and ride "The Flying Fifty-Five" for the Derby.

Worlds Apart

By M. P. WILLCOCKS

Author of "The Sleeping Partner," "The Keystone," etc.

Two widely divergent characters, one a supreme but lovable egoist, the other an idealist who has never been able to live happily without sharing to the full the joys and sorrows of a troubled and chaotic time, are held in balance.

Middle-aged, these two magnetic figures find the real challenge to their several ways of life thrown down by the younger generation, determined, active men from the war, whose fate is in the hands of circumstances, the influence of which was at work before they were born.

The story is one of heredity, hidden, transformed, but never eliminated. There are tragic moments, but the tone is one of humour. Lydia Wyatt is a Mrs. Proudle without the shrewishness, a woman who shapes other people's lives with results that are especially disconcerting to herself.

Alas, that Spring—!

By ELINOR MORDAUNT

Author of "The Little Soul," "Laura Creighton," etc.

This is entirely a novel of youth. The scene is laid in Ireland before the war, the story opening when Lord Shaen, the hero, a happy-go-lucky Etonian, is sixteen, and the heroine, Henrietta Rorke, thirteen years of age. It is late afternoon when Shaen arrives to say good-bye to Henrietta on his parents taking him to the West Indies, and in her passionate desire to prove her love for him Henrietta gives in to his entreaties to camp in a cave upon the mountain-side with him for that one night, passionately innocent as a child. Gossip and a hurried marriage result.

Two years of happiness pass, until Lord Shaen becomes entangled with an actress, and Henrietta, broken-hearted, drowns herself in a mountain lake.

The story ends with young Shaen, realising his loss, weeping with his head in the lap of the woman by whom he was infatuated.

Makeshifts

By MARGARET BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

Author of "The Mayoress's Wooing," etc.

How a woman in love lets a strange man suffer to save her own happiness, and then offers herself sacrificially to redeem him, gives this novel its title.

By a sudden tide of very curious circumstances a Welsh draper's daughter in the Midlands, Myfanwy Rhos, has the whole public reputation of a famous priest placed in her hands. He is publicly accused, and by a word she can save him.

It is timely and topical, and will be widely read, the more so because its subject is dealt with sympathetically and without rancour from one who writes of Church matters from the inside. This is what is called a strong novel of human passion and spiritual struggle, but it is presented with vivacity and colour, and never for a moment loses its "go" and interest.

Heartbeat

By STACY AUMONIER

Author of "The Love-a-Duck," "One After Another," etc.

This novel concerns the life of an extremely interesting and emotional girl of strange parentage. One observes the influence upon her character and development by the forces of heredity and environment. Her father was a Chancellor of the Exchequer, her mother an obscure actress. On her father's death she herself plunges into theatrical life, of which we have many vivid pictures. Her spiritual development is drawn with the inevitable certainty of Greek drama. One foresees the outcome, but the interest in the "Heartbeat" is the interest which colours all human emotions and relationships. Barbara Powerscourt is an intensely human modern type, swayed by innate weaknesses and complexities, but nevertheless capable of a sublime self-sacrifice.

Partners of Chance

By H. H. KNIBBS

A tale of Arizona, of men who lived a rough-and-tumble life out there on the highly-coloured deserts, under the shadows of the painted mesas. It is a story rich with the tang of the country, and happy in the author's choice of characters. "Little Jim" Hastings and his father, "Big Jim," pals by force of circumstance; "Panhandle" Sears, "Big Jim's" enemy; Bartley, an author and gentleman; "Cheyenne," tramp-rider and cowboy poet—all are fascinating types of diverse human nature, and in the deft hands of Mr. Knibbs they take on the vitality and individuality of living men and women.

The Million-Dollar Suitcase

By ALICE MacGOWAN and PERRY NEWBERRY

A keen, satisfying, well-written mystery story with distinctly novel features of situation and development which will appeal to all lovers of a good detective yarn.

Suppose a clever man had planned for six years a discovery-proof crime that was to lay open to him his heart's desires, and when he had committed it, found it unexpectedly but inevitably involved the perpetration of a second and more dangerous crime, detection in which would mean ruin? Would he dare the second crime? And could he, on short notice, devise a plan for getting it accomplished, so diabolically crafty as to defy detection and further complicate discovery of the first crime?

Revolving Fates

By ESSEX SMITH

Author of "Shepherdless Sheep"

A singularly powerful story of love and intrigue, involving an unusual plot. The principal characters belong to a family that for centuries has remained tied to ancestral lands. Intense human interest characterises the story. The love of a brother and sister is all but wrecked when they discover their father's infidelity.

The Kingmakers By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "Little Comrade" (54th Thousand).

A thrilling, modern romance of a throne and the intrigue that surrounded it. A famous journalist, whose extraordinary adventures play a leading part in the story, is dragged into the whirlpool of intrigue, passion, and devotion, with results as exciting to the reader as everyone concerned in this fight for a throne.

The Gazebo By BARONESS VON HUTTEN

Author of "Pam," "The Lordship of Love," etc.

The particular gazebo which gives the name to this book is a windowed balcony overlooking the village street, in the country home of Peg Doria, a well-known novelist who befriends Jenny Mayes, a clever, but half-educated, middle-class London girl.

Peg Doria has seen nothing of her husband for ten years and is not displeased by the attentions of Sir Dominick Audley, a widower of fifty. But Sir Dominick, in her absence, is accepted by Jenny, and Peg Doria is fiercely jealous.

It is from the gazebo that Jenny overhears a conversation from which she gathers that her suitor and Mrs. Doria care for each other; and from the gazebo, too, Mrs. Doria looks down on her derelict husband, who vainly tries to create a scandal in the village.

John Edgar's Angels By WINIFRED GRAHAM

Author of "Breakers on the Sand," "The Daughter Terrible,"
"Falling Waters," etc.

Winifred Graham's new novel deals with the love of a man for two women, one a Society beauty, the other the piquante daughter of a prosperous grocer. The character of the hero, John Edgar, is a curious mixture of Puritanical idealism and fiery passion. His unhappy childhood is a striking contrast to his subsequent career, when, in new and bewildering Society, he meets the beautiful daughter of Lord Porthminster. Through the ramifications of a plot that seems more like real life than fiction, one wonders whether John Edgar's story is not a human document lightly disguised.

The Inheritance of Jean Trouvé

By NEVIL HENSHAW

Author of "Aline of the Grand Woods," etc.

Jean Trouvé is disinherited by his grandfather and turned adrift poor and friendless in a strange land. But the blood in the boy's veins is an inheritance with which the grandfather does not reckon—character, courage, and a love of the soil.

Mr. Henshaw has written a novel which appeals to all who appreciate beauty and value truth; who prefer to associate with worthy characters worthily portrayed; and who are moved by the authentic reflections of the pathos of life.

The Great Roxhythe By GEORGETTE HEYER

Author of "The Black Moth: A Romance of the Eighteenth Century."

This book is notable for the delightful portrait which it contains of Charles II. The unscrupulousness of the monarch is patent, yet one is made to feel his amazing charm, his wit, whimsicality, and good humour. Like master like man, the Marquis of Roxhythe is ruthless where the interests of Charles are concerned. Through the intrigues of the reign he moves, a romantic figure, elegant, supercilious, dominating every situation. Attached to Roxhythe as his secretary, and captivated by the spell of his engaging personality, is young Christopher Dart, who would be loyal to King and Country both. But the two were not compatible under the Merry Monarch; hence the theme and sub-title of the book: "Under which king. Bezonian?" Christopher, assailed by doubts, is torn by his love for Roxhythe, whose devotion to Charles is absolute, unswerving, and entirely without scruple. Withal, "the great Roxhythe," in spite of his ruthlessness, compels the fascination of the reader by the sheer force of his magnetic personality

The Red Vulture By FREDERICK SLEATH

Author of "Sniper Jackson," "A Breaker of Ships," etc.

"The Red Vulture" is a thrilling story of the criminal adventures of a young gentleman whose career as a burglar is unknown to anyone. While making an entry through a cellar wall into a house where he believes jewels are to be found, he is amazed by the sight of what appears to be a gorgeously equipped Eastern temple—actually the headquarters of a murderous secret society. He recognises the principal dancing girl as one he had loved before he was dismissed the Service for embezzlement. His breaking up the gang, his love for the sister of Clara, who poisons herself, and the clearing of his character, all provide sustained and thrilling entertainment.

The Fool of Destiny By ROLF BENNETT
and KATHERINE HARRINGTON

Shipwrecked, Jimmy Noble, an actor, is adrift in a small boat with Ferris, a stoker, who, under a mask of grime, is Noble's double. Ferris loves Aida Clavering, who is engaged to Noble, her colleague in musical comedy. Noble is picked up and Ferris, apparently dead, is left in the boat, after Noble has taken from his body a belt of valuable pearls, in accordance with a solemn pact they have made. Saved in the end, Ferris believes he has been victimised by Noble, who, with Aida, is now on the London stage. Noble, drugged by a dope fiend, is found by Ferris, who assumes his identity and is on the point of marrying Aida. The characters are thoroughly alive, and the interest is sustained to a satisfactory conclusion. The dope man is murdered.

Manetta's Marriage

By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "The Shutters of Silence," "Uncle Jeremy," etc

This is Mr. Burgin's sixty-sixth novel.

Adonais Millette, a young Canadian poet, is married to the impetuous, passionate Seraphine Daoust, who is drinking herself to death and, through her unreasoning jealousy, makes his life a hell. He "puts out" for England, meets the beautiful Manetta, and the jealous Seraphine, hearing of this, pretends to be dead in order to entrap him into a bigamous marriage with Manetta, who is the illegitimate child of a wealthy old antiquarian. The story tells how Seraphine's plan succeeds, of her claiming Adonais, and his parting with Manetta until . . .

But we must not "give away" Mr. Burgin's plot. Suffice it to say that "Manetta's Marriage" is one of the most absorbing and exciting, pathetic and yet humorous, stories he has ever written, which will grasp the reader's attention from start to finish. The character of Manetta is a wonderful study of a beautiful, loving and resourceful woman when confronted with a disaster which threatens to shatter her happiness.

Average Cabins

By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Lady Trent's Daughter," "Tressider's Sister," etc.

The absorbing love-story of a woman who, until she is thirty-five, is bound hand and foot to her mother's authority. The hero, Denis Lorimer, a Catholic, six years her junior, is an old friend of her brother, Father John Ponsford, and was guilty of embezzlement before the story opens. The setting of the early chapters is in Italy, where Denis has to fight a duel with the brother of a girl whom he deceives. Nothing could be more human than the story of Janet, her bondage and her deliverance, and the way in which the conscience of the wayward Denis is revealed.

The House of Discord

By MARY E. and
THOMAS W. HANSHEW

An intriguing murder mystery story. The House of Discord is a Scottish castle. An agitated girl, daughter of the old Laird, Sir Andrew Duggan, comes to implore the immediate help of Scotland Yard. She declares her horrid Italian step-mother is slowly but determinedly poisoning her husband, the girl's father. Also that the Italian wife means to get Ross Duggan, elder son and heir, disinherited, and get her own son Cyril put in his place. Detective Cleek takes up the case somewhat sceptically. He goes north, and finds that something is very wrong. His ultimate discovery is surprising and not at all what Miss Duggan believed. Sir Andrew is murdered in a strange way

Desert Lovers

By KATHLYN RHODES

Author of "A Desert Cain," "The Will of Allah," etc.

The scene is laid in Egypt, where Sheila Raymond, travelling with her uncle, meets Omar Bey, a young Egyptian, who falls in love with her, ignorant of a secret connected with his birth which makes their marriage undesirable. Helen Montague, a young widow, is attracted by Sheila's cousin Kenyon, who succumbs to her beauty, but leaves her when he learns that she has caused the death of his best friend. Helen has led a somewhat unscrupulous life, but her love for Kenyon is genuine, and finally leads her, when visiting Omar's marvellous desert home, to an act of heroism which averts a terrible tragedy. The end of the book fulfils the prophecy of an Arab soothsayer, "Five shall ride over the desert towards the south but three only shall return."

The Goddess That Grew Up

By ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

Author of "What Woman Wishes," etc.

English fathers are singularly stubborn in the opposition they show to the marriage of their daughters. Basilia Oliver is the object of her father's most impassioned worship; all the circumstances of her life conspire to concentrate the fire of her father's love and ambition wholly upon her. When the time comes for life to beckon her to a more exciting destiny than that of unpaid companion to a middle-aged parent a struggle ensues in which her first lover is dexterously put out of the way by her father. An intimate friend of the family acquires an inkling of the true state of affairs and comes to the rescue, and Basilia discovers in her second lover the boy from whom her father had jealously parted her as a child.

To the Adventurous

By E. NESBIT

Author of "The Red House," "The Lark," "A Holiday Honeymoon," etc.

E. Nesbit is admittedly mistress of the difficult art of the short story. Her last book of this order was a collection of horror-stories, worthy of inclusion in the same category as those of Ambrose Bierce or Edgar Allan Poe. In "To the Adventurous" E. Nesbit strikes a new note. "Adventures," she tells us, "are to the adventurous!" and the adventures are drawn for us from all the varied fields of life and love. The book will not make you afraid to go to bed, but you are likely to sit up till the small hours because you cannot lay it down. Each story is perfect in its kind.

City of Wonder

By E. CHARLES VIVIAN

Author of "Passion Fruit," "The Woman Tempted Me," etc.

This is an adventure story of three men who, after having faced many dangers and surmounted almost insurmountable obstacles, reach the forgotten city, Kir-Asa, hidden in some Pacific land, and the way to it guarded by savages who use poisoned arrows, and by snakes of the jungle and fierce, strong, stealthy things of the wild.

They strike a wonderfully made road, descend a wonderful chasm, and Watkins the leader, finds inscriptions made on a rock by one of his ancestors who reached Kir-Asa.

At the wonder city they meet Ag, a descendant of Watkins' relative ; and Faulkner, one of the trio, and Ag's daughter, Eve, fall in love. A rival seeking vengeance, a mad king with mad sons, and a battle in which Faulkner's bride and Brent are killed, are features of this gripping romance.

A Great American Novel.

Vandemark's Folly

By HERBERT QUICK

Author of "Yellowstone Nights," etc.

A good plot and a charming love-story provide intense human interest in this wonderful description of the foundation and growth of an American township before the Civil War. Vandemark Township, Monteroy County, State of Iowa, U.S.A., was established by J. T. Vandemark, who, in his stolid, faithful way, tells the reader of Virginia, the one and only girl of his heart, and Rowena, an unfortunate whom he shelters and befriends, regardless, as ever, of public opinion. Vandemark's romance and its happy ending with Virginia as his wife and mother of his children is a love-story that will please many women readers. He tells of his hard boyhood ; of his life as a canal-boat driver ; of his hunt for his poor mother ; of how he was cheated of his full patrimony by his scoundrelly step-father ; of his getting land in Iowa ; and of his trek thither.

Puppets of Fate

By SELWYN JEPSON

Author of "The Qualified Adventurer."

The thrilling adventures of Paul Harper, a young man of artistic temperament, whose father, a business magnate, shares with Joyce, his secretary whom Paul adores, the belief that his son has not enough "push" in him to succeed, although the latent power is there. They are disillusioned, however, when Paul's enemy tries to deprive him of the fruits of an invention. Paul comes out on top after many exciting experiences, and it transpires afterwards that his father had a hand in the game in order to test his son's worth.

Ann

By MARY JULIAN

Author of "Where Jasmines Bloom."

Making a strong appeal to women readers, this is a character study of a girl imbued from childhood with the principle that the one aim in life is to succeed and attain material prosperity. Ann, a plain girl, has a peculiar attraction and personality, which she exploits. As a poor widow she returns to her mother's home, only to find that her circumstances are incompatible with a mother's scheme of life. She nearly wrecks her cousin's happiness by her efforts to make a new lover her slave—so regardless is she of the welfare of others. In spite of all, however, there is a better side to her, and it does not come as altogether a surprise that, having gained her object, she suddenly has a great revulsion against herself, from which springs happiness.

Peter's People

By CURTIS YORKE

Author of "The Unknown Road," etc.

Curtis Yorke's new novel tells how a young man (Peter Wistray) brings his wife to live in the same house as his mother and sisters, who are dependent on him. The arrangement leads to various complications, as Peter's family resent his being married at all, and his wife, Pamela, resents their attitude towards her. Things go from bad to worse, and tragic happenings are narrowly averted. But gradually Lady Wistray and her daughters are won over by Pamela's charm, and all ends well. Though the plot is comparatively simple, the interest is absorbing, and the characterisation and dialogue are of a high order.

The Witch Man

By MARGARET BELLE HOUSTON

A novel of the Virginia Mountains, which radiates charm and distinction, as the mystery of the "Witch Man"—and his love idyll—is unravelled among the curious mountain folk. These individualistic people, their manners, their customs, their superstitions are depicted with sympathy and understanding.

Miss Brandt : Adventuress

By MARGERY H. LAWRENCE

This is a thrilling narrative of the duel of wits between a detective and a young and beautiful adventuress who moves in the highest circles of society. The story of how Miss Brandt falls in love, but nevertheless cannot resist using her lover as an unconscious tool to aid her in robbery, and of the progress and the final result of the duel with the detective, is one of fascinating interest.

Their Chosen People By Mrs. C. A. NICHOLSON

Author of "Martin, Son of John."

A Jewish family and their relation to Gentiles is the central interest. The characters, notably Conrad and his sister, aunt, and grandmother De Costro, are quite alive. The story is written with knowledge, sympathy, and insight. It possesses therefore an attractive and moving quality quite uncommon in books or stories dealing with modern Jewish life.

Nick Nonpareil By MARIAN BOWER

Part author of "The Chinese Puzzle" and "The Green Cord."

The scene of this book is laid in one of the beautiful lakeside towns of Northern Italy. Thither His Excellency Sir Ching Wang, a Chinese Minister, has come to attend a diplomatic conference.

Arising out of this mission, there follows not only a tale of such love and revenge as is possible only to hot Italian temperaments, in which His Excellency intervenes with typical Celestial detachment, but the re-appearance of Nick Nonpareil, the man who has flouted life, defied responsibility, cast off certain mystic bonds, only to find, as he is driven to exclaiming himself, that when the wheel is minded to go round, a hair from an angel's head will do as well as a hempen rope to bind the victim on it.

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New Books for Young People

Maya : The Adventures of a Little Bee

By WALDEMAR BONSEL

Translated by CHARLOTTE REMFRY-KIDD

*With Colour Frontispiece and numerous illustrations by
L. R. BRIGHTWELL, F.Z.S.*

"The Adventures of Maya the Bee" has become a European classic, and no less than 483 editions have already been sold. It has been translated into nearly every foreign language, and English readers, young and old, will be entertained by this fascinating story.

Not since the days of the brothers Grimm and Hans Andersen has there been a book of similar charm. Waldemar Bonsel tells, in simple but beautiful language which every child can understand, the story of a bee's life, its meetings and adventures with grasshoppers and ladybirds, elfs and butterflies, spiders and hornets. The description of animals is a revelation of the delicate miracles and unsuspected beauties of Nature. Wise ideas and a refreshing humour permeate the book, which will delight not only children (for whom it is an ideal gift-book) but all true friends of Nature.

The Goldfish Bowl

By PHYLLIS AUSTIN

Beautifully illustrated, with 4 Colour Plates, end papers and other drawings by CHARLES ROBINSON.

Tells how Peggy and Timothy have a goldfish bowl and a cuckoo-clock ; they love both. Their papa and mamma are away, and two dreadful aunts are in charge. They have skin like oil-cloth and astrakhan eyebrows and bony figures, and they are as horrid as they look. Old Bootles, the factotum, used to tell them stories ; he helps them to their Goldfish Bowl adventure. They go through the doorway of a shell to the bottom of the Wonderful Sea. Among others, they meet the Queer Clocks and Davey Jones and his Locker, and the Goldfish King and Queen, and all sorts of fish. Two crabs are like the aunts.

After a delightful visit to the lovely land of wishes and dreams they arise to the surface, and then the twins wake up to find that their goldfish bowl adventures are a dream, but the aunts have vanished. Their mother and father are there, and a new baby sent by the fairies.

Told in a Garden By BERYL SEFTON SPENCER

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